




The Shadow of Ashlydyat, Volume I

Mrs. Henry Wood

DODO



PRESS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

The Shadow of
Ashlydyat, Volume I

Mrs. Henry Wood

DODO  PRESS

The shadow of Ashlydyat, Volume I

By

Mrs. Henry Wood

1863

W. P. Mitchell 1863

CONTENTS

Part 1

- Chapter 1 - The meet of the hounds
- Chapter 2 - Lady Godolphin's folly
- Chapter 3 - The dark plain in the moonlight
- Chapter 4 - All Soul's rectory
- Chapter 5 - Thomas Godolphin's love
- Chapter 6 - Charlotte Pain
- Chapter 7 - Broomhead
- Chapter 8 - A snake in the grass
- Chapter 9 - Mr. Sandy's trade
- Chapter 10 - The shadow
- Chapter 11 - A telegraphic despatch
- Chapter 12 - Dead
- Chapter 13 - Unavailing regrets
- Chapter 14 - Gone on before
- Chapter 15 - A midnight walk
- Chapter 16 - The last journey
- Chapter 17 - A row on the water
- Chapter 18 - Straw in the streets
- Chapter 19 - One stick discarded
- Chapter 20 - A revelation to all souls' rector
- Chapter 21 - Charlotte's bargain
- Chapter 22 - Dangerous amusement

Part 2

- Chapter 1 - Sixty pounds to Old Jekyl
- Chapter 2 - Why did it anger him?
- Chapter 3 - Cecil's romance
- Chapter 4 - Charlotte Pain's "Turn-out."
- Chapter 5 - A revelation
- Chapter 6 - Mr. Verrall's chambers
- Chapter 7 - Beyond recall
- Chapter 8 - The tradition of the dark plain
- Chapter 9 - The dead alive again
- Chapter 10 - Nine thousand and forty-five pounds

Part I. Chapter 1.

THE MEET OF THE HOUNDS

It was a bright day in autumn: the scene one of those fair ones rarely witnessed except in England. The sun, warm and glowing, almost as that of a summer's day, shone on the stubble of the cornfields, whence the golden grain had recently been gathered; gilded the tops of the trees—so soon to pass into the "sere and yellow leaf;" illumined the blue hills in the distance, and brought out the nearer features of the landscape in all their light and shade. A fine landscape, comprising hill and dale, water and green pastures, woods and open plains. Amidst them rose the signs of busy life; mansions, cottages, hamlets, railways, and churches, whose steeples ascended high, pointing the way to a better Land.

The town of Prior's Ash, lying in a valley, was alive that gay morning with excitement. It was the day appointed for the first meet of the hounds; the P. A. hounds, of some importance in the county; and people from far and near were flocking to see them throw off. Old and young, gentle and simple, lords of the soil and tradesmen, all were wending their way to the meet. The master, Colonel Max, was wont on this, the first morning of the season, to assemble at his house for breakfast as many as his large dining-room could by any species of crowding contain; and it was a fine sight, drawing forth its numerous spectators to watch them come out in procession, to the meet. As many carriages-and-four, with their fair occupants, would come to that first meet, as you could have seen in the old days on a country race-course. This show was an old-fashioned local custom; Colonel Max was pleased to keep it up, and he lacked not supporters. The opening this year was unusually early.

The gay crowd was arriving, some from the breakfast, some from their homes. The rendezvous was a wide, open common, with no space wanting. The restrained hounds snarled away at a short distance, and their attendants, attired for the hunt, clacked their whips among them.

Riding a noble horse, and advancing from the opposite direction to that of Colonel Max and his guests, came a tall, stately man, getting in years now. His features were regular as though they had been

chiselled from marble: his fine blue eyes could sparkle yet; and his snow-white hair, wavy as of yore, was worn rather long behind, giving him somewhat the appearance of a patriarch. But the healthy bloom, once characteristic of his face, had left it now: the paleness of ill-health sat there, and he bent his body, as if too weak to bear up on his horse. His approach was discerned; and many started forward, as with one impulse, to greet him. None stood higher in the estimation of his fellow-men than did Sir George Godolphin; no other name was more respected in the county.

"This is good indeed, Sir George! To see you out again!"

"I thought I might venture," said Sir George, essaying to meet a dozen hands at once. "It has been a long confinement; a tedious illness. Six months, and never out of the house; and, for the last fortnight, out only in a garden-chair. My lady wanted to box me up in the carriage this morning; if I must come, she said. But I would not have it: had I been unable to sit my horse, I would have remained at home."

"You fell weak still?" remarked one, after most of the greeters had had their say, and were moving away.

"Ay. Strength, for me, has finally departed, I fear."

"You must not think that, Sir George. Now that you have so far recovered as to go out, you will improve daily."

"And get well all one way, Godolphin," joined in the hearty voice of Colonel Max. "Never lose heart, man."

Sir George turned his eyes upon Colonel Max with a cheerful glance.

"Who told you I was losing heart?"

"Yourself. When a man begins to talk of his strength having finally departed, what's that, but a proof of his losing heart? Low spirits never cured any one yet: but they have killed thousands."

"I shall be sixty-six years old to-morrow, colonel: and if, at that age, I can 'lose heart' at the prospect of the great change, my life has served

me to little purpose. The young may faint at the near approach of death; the old should not."

"Sixty-six, old!" ejaculated Colonel Max. "I have never kept count of my own age, but I know I am that if I am a day; and I am young yet. I may live these thirty years to come: and shall try for it, too."

"I hope you will, colonel," was the warm answer of Sir Geo* Godolphin. "Prior's Ash could ill spare you."

"I don't know about that," laughed the colonel. "But I do know that I could ill spare life. I wish you could take the run with us this morning!"

"I wish I could. But that you might accuse me of—what was it? —losing heart, I would say that my last run with the hounds has been taken. It has cost me an effort to come so far as this, walking my horse at a snail's pace. Do you see Lady Godolphin? She ought to be here."

Colonel Max, who was a short man, raised himself in his stirrups, and gazed from point to point of the gradually increasing crowd. "In her carriage, I suppose?"

"In her carriage, of course," answered Sir George. "She is no amazon." But he did not avow his reason for inquiring after his wife's carriage—that he felt a giddiness stealing over him, and thought he might be glad of its support. Neither did he explain that he was unable to look round for it himself just then, under fear of falling from his horse.

"I don't think she has come yet," said Colonel Max. "I do not see the livery. As to the ladies, they all look so like one another now, with their furbelows and feathers, that I'll be shot if I should know my own wife—if I had one—at a dozen paces' distance. Here is some one else, however."

Riding up quietly, and reining in at the side of Sir George, was a gentleman of middle height, with dark hair, dark grey eyes, and a quiet, pale countenance. In age he may have wanted some three or four years of forty, and a casual observer might have pronounced him "insignificant," and never have cast on him a second glance. But

there was a certain attraction in his face which won its way to hearts; and his voice sounded wonderfully sweet and kind as he grasped the hand of Sir George.

"My dear father! I am so glad to see you here!"

"And surprised too, I conclude, Thomas," returned Sir George, smiling on his son. "Come closer to me, will you, and let me rest my arm upon your shoulder for a minute. I feel somewhat giddy."

"Should you have ventured out on horseback?" inquired Thomas Godolphin, as he hastened to place himself in proximity with his father.

"The air will do me good; and the exertion also. It is nothing to feel a little weak after a confinement such as mine has been. You don't follow the hounds to-day, I see, Thomas," continued Sir George, noting his son's plain costume.

A smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's lips. "No, sir. I rarely do follow them. I leave amusement to George."

"Is he here, that graceless George?" demanded the knight, searching into the crowd with fond and admiring eyes. But the admiring eyes did not see the object they thought to rest on.

"He is sure to be here, sir. I have not seen him."

"And your sisters? Are they here?"

"No. They did not care to come."

"Speak for Janet and Cecil, if you please, Thomas," interrupted a young lady's voice at this juncture. The knight looked down; his son looked down also: there stood the second daughter of the family,

Bessy Godolphin. She was a dark, quick, active little woman of thirty, with an ever-ready tongue, and deep grey eyes.

"Bessy!" uttered Sir George, in astonishment. "Have you come here on foot?"

"Yes, papa. Thomas asked us whether we wished to attend the meet; and Janet—who must always be master and mistress, you know—answered that we did not. Cecil dutifully agreed with her. I did care to attend it; so I came alone."

"But, Bessy, why did you not say so?" remonstrated Mr. Godolphin. "You should have ordered the carriage; you should not have come on foot. What will people think?"

"Think!" she echoed, holding up her pleasant face to her brother, in its saucy independence. "They can think anything they please; I am Bessy Godolphin. I wonder how many scores have come on foot?"

"None, Bessy, of your degree, who have carriages to sit in or horses to ride," said Sir George.

"Papa, I like to use my legs better than to have them cramped under a habit or in a carriage; and you know I never could bend to form and fashion," she said, laughing. "Dear papa, I am delighted to see you! I was so thankful when I heard you were here! Janet will be ready to eat her own head now, for not coming."

"Who told you I was here, Bessy?"

"Old Jekyl. He was leaning on his palings as I came by, and called out the information to me almost before I could hear him. 'The master's gone to it, Miss Bessy! he is out once again! But he had not on his scarlet,' the old fellow added; and his face lost its gladness. Papa, the whole world is delighted that you should have recovered, and be once more amongst them."

"Not quite recovered yet, Bessy. Getting better, though; getting better. Thank you, Thomas; the faintness has passed."

"Is not Lady Godolphin here, papa?"

"She must be here by this time. I wish I could see her carriage: you must get into it."

"I did not come for that, papa," returned Bessy, with a touch of her warm temper.

"My dear, I wish you to join her. I do not like to see you here on foot."

"I shall set the fashion, papa," laughed Bessy, again. "At the great meet next year, you will see half the pretenders of the county toiling here on foot. I say I am Bessy Godolphin."

The knight ranged his eyes over the motley group, but he could not discern his wife. Sturdy, bluff old fox-hunters were there in plenty, and well-got-up young gentlemen, all on horseback, their white cords and scarlet coats gleaming in the sun. Ladies were chiefly in carriages; a few were mounted, who would ride quietly home again when the hounds had thrown off; a very few—they might be counted his units—would follow the field. Prior's Ash and its neighbourhood was supplied in a very limited degree with what they were pleased to call masculine women: for the term "fast" had not then come in. Many a pretty woman, many a pretty girl was present, and the sportsmen lingered, and were well pleased to linger, in the sunshine of their charms, ere the business, for which they had come out, began, and they should throw themselves, heart and energy, into it.

On the outskirts of the crowd, sitting her horse well, was a handsome girl of right regal features and flashing black eyes. Above the ordinary height of woman, she was finely formed, her waist slender, her shoulders beautifully modelled. She wore a peculiar dress, and, from that cause alone, many eyes were on her. A well-fitting habit of bright grass-green, the corsage ornamented with buttons of silver-gilt; similar buttons were also at the wrists, but they were partially hidden by her white gauntlets. A cap, of the same bright green, rested on the upper part of her forehead, a green-and-gold feather on its left side glittering as the sun's rays played upon it. It was a style of dress which had not yet been seen at Prior's Ash, and was regarded with some doubt. But, as you are aware, it is not a dress in itself which is condemned or approved: it depends upon who wears it: and as the young lady wearing this was just now the fashion at Prior's Ash, feather and habit were taken into favour forthwith. She could have worn none more adapted to her peculiar style of beauty.

Bending to his very saddle-bow, as he talked to her—for, though she was tall, he was taller still—was a gentleman of courtly mien. In his fine upright figure, his fair complexion and wavy hair, his chiselled

features and dark blue eyes, might be traced a strong resemblance to Sir George Godolphin. But the lips had a more ready smile upon them than Sir George's had ever worn, for his had always been sonic-what of the sternest, the blue eyes twinkled with a gayer light when gazing into other eyes, than could ever have been charged upon Sir George. But the bright complexion had been Sir George's once; giving to his face, as it now did to his son's, a delicate beauty, almost as that of woman. "Graceless George," old Sir George was fond of calling him; but it was an appellation given in love, in pride, in admiration. He bent to his saddle-bow, and his gay blue eyes flashed with unmistakable admiration into those black ones as he talked to the lady: and the black eyes most certainly flashed admiration back again. Dangerous eyes were those of Charlotte Pain's! And not altogether lovable.

"Do you always keep your promises as you kept that one yesterday?" she was asking him.

"I did not make a promise yesterday—that I remember. Had I made one to you, I should have kept it."

"Fickle and faithless," she cried. "Men's promises are as words traced upon the sand. When you met me yesterday in the carriage with Mrs. Verrall, and she asked you to take compassion on two forlorn dames, and come to Ashlydyat in the evening and dissipate our ennui, what was your answer?"

"That I would do so, if it were possible."

"Was nothing more explicit implied?"

George Godolphin laughed. Perhaps his conscience told him that he had implied more, in a certain pressure he remembered giving to that fair hand, which was resting now, gauntleted, upon her reins. Gay George had meant to dissipate Ashlydyat's ennui, if nothing more tempting offered. But something more tempting did offer: and he had spent the evening in the company of one who was more to him than was Charlotte Pain.

"An unavoidable engagement arose, Miss Pain. Otherwise you may rely upon it. I should have been at Ashlydyat."

The Shadow of Ashlydyat, Volume I

"Unavoidable!" she replied, her eyes gleaming with something very like anger into those which smiled on her. "I know what your engagement was. You were at Lady Godolphin's Folly."

"Right. Commanded to it by my father."

"Oh!"

"Solicited, if not absolutely commanded," he continued. "And a wish from Sir George now bears its weight: we may not have him very long with us."

A smile of mockery, pretty and fascinating to look upon, played upon her rich red lips. "It is edifying to hear these filial sentiments expressed by Mr. George Godolphin! Take you care, sir, to act up to them."

"Do you think I need the injunction? How shall I make my peace with you?"

"By coming to Ashlydyat some other evening while the present moon lasts. I mean, while it illumines the early part of the evening."

She dropped her voice to a low key, and her tone had changed to seriousness. George Godolphin looked at her in surprise.

"What is the superstition," she continued to whisper, "that attaches to Ashlydyat?"

"Why do you ask me this?" he hastily said.

"Because, yesterday evening, when I was sitting on that seat under the ash-trees, watching the road from Lady Godolphin's Folly—well watching for you, if you like it better: but I can assure you there is nothing in the avowal that need excite your vanity, as I see it is doing. When a gentleman makes a promise, I expect him to keep it; and, looking upon your coming as a matter of course, I did watch for you; as I might watch for one of Mrs. Verrall's servants, had I sent him on an errand and expected his return."

"Thank you," said George Godolphin, with a laugh. "But suffer my vanity to rest in abeyance for a while, will you, and go on with what you were saying?"

"Are you a convert to the superstition?" she inquired, disregarding the request.

"N—o," replied George Godolphin. But his voice sounded strangely indecisive. "Pray continue, Charlotte."

It was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name and though she saw that it was done in the unconscious excitement the moment, her cheeks flushed to a deeper crimson.

"Did you ever see the Shadow?" she breathed.

He bowed his head.

"What form does it take?"

George Godolphin did not answer. He appeared lost in thought, as he scored his horse's neck with his hunting-whip.

"The form of a bier, on which rests something covered with a p that may be supposed to be a coffin; with a mourner at the head one at the foot?" she whispered.

He bowed his head again: very gravely.

"Then I saw it last night. I did indeed. I was sitting under the ash-trees, and I saw a strange shadow in the moonlight that I had never seen before—"

"Where?" he interrupted.

"In that wild-looking part of the grounds as you look across from the ash-trees. Just in front of the archway, where the ground is bare. It was there. Mr. Verrall says he wonders Sir George does not have those gorse-bushes cleared away, and the ground converted into civilized land, like the rest of it."

"It has been done, but the bushes grow again."

"Well, I was sitting there, and I saw this unusual shadow. It arrested my eye at once. Where did it come from, I wondered: what cast it? I never thought of the Ashlydyat superstition; never for a moment. I only thought what a strange appearance the shadow wore. I thought of a lying-in-state; I thought of a state funeral, where the coffin rests on a bier, and a mourner sits at the head and a mourner at the foot. Shall I tell you," she suddenly broke off, "what the scene altogether looked like?"

"Do so."

"Like a graveyard. They may well call it the Dark Plain! The shadow might be taken for a huge tomb with two images weeping over it, and the bushes around assumed the form of lesser ones. Some, square; some, long; some, high; some, low; but all looking not unlike graves in the moonlight."

"Moonlight shadows are apt to bear fanciful forms to a vivid imagination, Miss Pain," he lightly observed.

"Have not others indulged the same fancy before me? I remember to have heard so."

"As they have said. They never took the form to my sight," he returned, with a half-smile of ridicule. "When I know bushes to be bushes, I cannot by any stretch of imagination magnify them into graves. You must have had this Ashlydyat nonsense in your head."

"I have assured you that I had not," she rejoined in a firm tone. "It was only after I had been regarding it for some time—and the longer I looked, the plainer the shadow seemed to grow—that I thought of the Ashlydyat tale. All in an instant the truth flashed upon me—that it must be the apparition—"

"The what, Miss Pain?"

"Does the word offend you? It is a foolish one. The Shadow, then.

I remembered that the Shadow, so dreaded by the Godolphins, did take the form of a bier, with mourners weeping at its—"

"Was said to take it," he interposed, in a tone of quiet reproof; "that would be the better phrase. And, in speaking of the Shadow being dreaded by the Godolphins, you allude, I presume, to the Godolphins of the past ages. I know of none in the present who dread it: except my superstitious sister, Janet."

"How touchy you are upon the point!" she cried, with a light laugh.

"Do you know, George Godolphin, that that very touchiness betrays the fact that you, for one, are not exempt from the dread. And," she added, changing her tone again to one of serious sympathy, "did not the dread help to kill Mrs. Godolphin?"

"No," he gravely answered. "If you give ear to all the stories that the old wives of the neighbourhood love to indulge in, you will collect a valuable stock of fable-lore."

"Let it pass. If I repeated the fable, it was because I had heard it. But now you will understand why I felt vexed last night when you did not come. It was not for your sweet company I was pining, as your vanity has been assuming, but that I wanted you to see the Shadow.— How that girl is fixing her eyes upon us!"

George Godolphin turned at the last sentence, which was uttered abruptly. An open barouche had drawn up, and its occupants, two ladies, were both looking towards them. The one was a young girl, with a pale gentle face and dark eyes, as remarkable for their refined sweetness, as Miss Pain's were for their brilliancy. The other was a little lady of middle age, dressed youthfully, and whose naturally fair complexion was so excessively soft and clear, as to give a suspicion that nature had less hand in it than art. It was Lady Godolphin. She held her eye-glass to her eye, and turned it on the crowd.

"Maria, whatever is that on horseback?" she asked. "It looks green."

"It is Charlotte Pain in a bright-green riding-habit," was the young lady's answer.

"A bright-green riding-habit! And her head seems to glitter! Has she anything in her cap?"

"It appears to be a gold feather."

"She must look beautiful! Very handsome, does she not?"

"For those who admire her style —very," replied Maria Hastings.

Which was certainly not the style of Maria Hastings. Quiet, retiring, gentle, she could only wonder at those who dressed in bright-coloured habits with gold buttons and feathers, and followed the hounds over gates and ditches. Miss Hastings wore a pretty white silk bonnet, and grey cashmere mantle. Nothing could be plainer; but then, she was a clergyman's daughter.

"It is on these occasions that I regret my deficient sight," said Lady Godolphin. "Who is that, in scarlet, talking to her? It resembles the figure of George Godolphin."

"It is he," said Maria. "He is coming towards us."

He was piloting his horse through the throng, returning greetings from every one. A universal favourite was George Godolphin. Charlotte Pain's fine eyes were following him with somewhat dimmed brilliancy: he was not so entirely hers as she could wish to see him.

"How are you this morning, Lady Godolphin?" But it was on the hand of Maria Hastings that his own lingered; and her cheeks took the hue of Charlotte Pain's, as he bent low to whisper words that were all too dear.

"George, do you know that your father is here?" said Lady Godolphin.

George, in his surprise, drew himself upright on his horse. "My father here! Is he, indeed?"

"Yes; and on horseback. Very unwise of him; but he would not be persuaded out of it. It was a sudden resolution that he appeared to take. I suppose the beauty of the morning tempted him. Miss Maria Hastings, what nonsense has George been saying to you? Your face is as red as his coat."

"That is what I was saying to her," laughed George Godolphin. "Asking her where her cheeks had borrowed their roses from."

A parting of the crowd brought Sir George Godolphin within view, and the family drew together in a group. Up went Lady Godolphin's glass again.

"Is that Bessy? My dear, with whom did you come?"

"I came by myself, Lady Godolphin. I walked."

"Oh dear!" uttered Lady Godolphin. "You do do the wildest things, Bessy! And Sir George allows you to do them!"

"Sir George does not," spoke the knight. "Sir George has already desired her to take her place in the carriage. Open the door, James."

Bessy laughed as she stepped into it. She cheerfully obeyed her father; but anything like ceremony, or, as the world may call it, etiquette, she waged war with.

"I expected to meet your sisters here, Bessy," said Lady Godolphin. "I want you all to dine with me to-day. We must celebrate the first reappearance of your father. You will bear the invitation to them."

"Certainly," said Bessy. "We shall be happy to come. I know Janet has no engagement."

"An early dinner, mind: five o'clock. Sir George cannot wait."

"To dine at supper-time," chimed in unfashionable Bessy. "George, do you hear? Lady Godolphin's at five."

A movement; a rush; a whirl. The hounds were preparing to throw off, and the field was gathering. George Godolphin hastily left the side of Miss Hastings, though he found time for a stolen whisper.

"Fare you well, my dearest."

The Shadow of Ashlydyat, Volume I

And when she next saw him, after the noise and confusion had cleared away, he was galloping in the wake of the baying pack, side by side with Charlotte Pain.

Part 1. Chapter 2.

LADY GODOLPHIN'S FOLLY.

Prior's Ash was not a large town, though of some importance in county estimation. In the days of the monks, when all good people were Roman Catholics, or professed to be, it had been but a handful of houses, which various necessities had caused to spring up round the priory: a flourishing and crowded establishment of religious men then; a place marked but by a few ruins now. In process of time the handful of houses had increased to several handfuls, the handfuls to a village, and the village to a borough town; still retaining the name bestowed on it by the monks—"Prior's Ash."

In the heart of the town was situated the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. It was an old-established and most respected firm, sound and wealthy. The third partner and second Godolphin, mentioned in it, was Thomas Godolphin, Sir George Godolphin's eldest son. Until he joined it, it had been Godolphin and Crosse. It was a matter of arrangement, understood by Mr. Crosse, that when anything happened to Sir George, Thomas would step into his father's place, as head of the firm, and George, whose name at present did not appear, though he had been long in the bank, would represent the last name; so that it would still remain Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Mr. Crosse, who, like Sir George, was getting in years, was remarkable for nothing but a close attention to business. He was a widower, without children, and prior's Ash wondered who would be the better for the filling of his garners.

The Godolphins could trace back to the ages of the monks. But of no very high ancestry boasted they; no titles, places, or honours; they ranked among the landed gentry as owners of Ashlydyat, and that was all. It was quite enough for them: to be lords of Ashlydyat was an honour they would not have bartered for a dukedom. They held by Ashlydyat. It was their pride, their stronghold, their boast. Had feudal times been in fashion now, they would have dug a moat around it, and fenced it in with fortifications, and called it their castle. Why did they so love it? It was but a poor place at best; nothing to look at; and, in the matter of space inside, was somewhat straitened. Oak-panelled rooms, dark as mahogany and garnished with cross beams, low ceilings, and mullioned windows, are not the

most consonant to modern taste. People thought that the Godolphins loved it from its associations and traditions; from the very fact that certain superstitions attached to it. Foolish superstitions, you will be inclined to call them, as contrasted with the enlightenment of these matter-of-fact days—I had almost said these days of materialism.

Ashlydyat was not entailed. There was a clause in the old deeds of tenure which prevented it. A wicked Godolphin (by which complimentary appellation his descendants distinguished him) had cut off the entail, and gambled the estate away; and though the Godolphins recovered it again in the course of one or two lives, the entail was not renewed. It was now bequeathed from father to son, and was always the residence of the reigning Godolphin. Thomas Godolphin knew that it would become his on the death of his father, as surely as if he were the heir by entail. The late Mr. Godolphin, Sir George's father, had lived and died in it. Sir George succeeded, and then he lived in it—with his wife and children. But he was not Sir George then: therefore, for a few minutes, while speaking of this part of his life, we will call him what he was—Mr. Godolphin. A pensive, thoughtful woman was Mrs. Godolphin, never too strong in health. She was Scotch by birth. Of her children, Thomas and Janet most resembled her; Bessy was like no one but herself: George and Cecilia inherited the beauty of their father. There was considerable difference in the ages of the children, for they had numbered thirteen. Thomas was the eldest, Cecilia the youngest; Janet, Bessy, and George were between them; and the rest, who had also been between them, had died, most of them in infancy. But, a moment yet, to give a word to the description of Ashlydyat, before speaking of the death of Mrs. Godolphin.

Passing out of Prior's Ash towards the west, a turning to the left of the high-road took you to Ashlydyat. Built of greystone, and lying somewhat in a hollow, it wore altogether a gloomy appearance. And it was intensely ugly. A low building of two storeys, irregularly built, with gables and nooks and ins-and-outs of corners, and a square turret in the middle, which was good for nothing but the birds to build on. It wore a time-honoured look, though, with all its ugliness, and the moss grew, green and picturesque, on its walls. Perhaps on the principle, or, let us say, by the subtle instinct of nature, that a mother loves a deformed child with a deeper affection than she feels for her other children, who are fair and sound of limb, did the Godolphins feel pride in their inheritance because it was ugly. But the grounds around it were beautiful, and the landscape,

so much of it as could be seen from that unelevated spot, was most grand to look upon. A full view might be obtained from the turret, though it was somewhat of a mount to get to it. Dark groves, and bright undulating lawns, shady spots where the water rippled, pleasant to bask in on a summer's day, sunny parterres of gay flowers scenting the air; charming, indeed, were the environs of Ashlydyat. All, except one spot: and that had charms also for some minds—sombre ones.

In one part of the grounds there grew a great quantity of ash-trees—and it was supposed, though not known, that these trees may originally have suggested the name, Ashlydyat: as they most certainly had that of Prior's Ash, given to the village by the monks. A few people wrote it in accordance with its pronunciation, Ash-lid-yat, but the old way of spelling it was retained by the family. As the village had swollen into a town, the ash-trees, growing there, were cleared away as necessity required; but the town was surrounded with them still.

Opposite to the ash-trees on the estate of Ashlydyat there extended a waste plain, totally out of keeping with the high cultivation around. It looked like a piece of rude common. Bushes of furze, broom, and other stunted shrubs grew upon it, none of them rising above the height of a two-year-old child. The description given by Charlotte Pain to George Godolphin was not an inapt one—that the place, with these stunted bushes on it, looked in the moonlight not unlike a graveyard. At the extremity, opposite to the ash-trees, there arose a high archway, a bridge built of greystone. It appeared to have formed part of an ancient fortification, but there was no trace of water having run beneath it. Beyond the archway was a low round building, looking like an isolated windmill without sails. It was built of greystone also, and was called the belfry: though there was as little sign of bells ever having been in it, as there was of water beneath the bridge. The archway had been kept from decay; the belfry had not, but was open in places to the heavens.

Strange to say, the appellation of this waste piece of land, with its wild bushes, was the "Dark Plain." Why? The plain was not dark: it was not shaded: it stood out, broad and open, in the full glare of sunlight. That certain dark tales had been handed down with the appellation, is true: and these may have given rise to the name. Immediately before the archway, for some considerable space, the ground was entirely bare. Not a blade of grass, not a shrub grew on it.

Or, as the story went, would grow. It was on this spot that the appearance, the Shadow, as mentioned by Charlotte Pain, would be sometimes seen. Whence the Shadow came, whether it was ghostly or earthly, whether those learned in science and philosophy could account for it by Nature's laws, whether it was cast by any gaseous vapour arising in the moonbeams, I am unable to say. If you ask me to explain it, I cannot. If you ask, why then do I write about it, I can only answer, because I have seen it. I have seen it with my own unprejudiced eyes; I have sat and watched it, in its strange stillness; I have looked about and around it, low down, high up, for some substance, ever so infinitesimal, that might cast its shade and enable me to account for it: and I have looked in vain. Had the moon been behind the archway, instead of behind me, that might have furnished a loophole of explanation: a very poor and inefficient loophole; a curious one also: for how can an archway in the substance be a bier and two mourners in its shadow? but, still, better than none.

No; there was nothing whatever, so far as human eyes—and I can tell you that keen ones and sceptical ones have looked at it—to cast the shade, or to account for it. There, as you sat and watched, stretched out the plain in the moonlight, with its low, tomb-like bushes, its clear space of bare land, the archway rising behind it. But, on the spot of bare land, before the archway, would rise the Shadow; not looking as if it were a shadow cast on the ground, but a palpable fact: as if a bier, with its two bending mourners, actually stood there in the substance. I say that I cannot explain it, or attempt to explain it; but I do say that there it was to be seen. Not often sometimes not for years together. It was called the Shadow of Ashlydyat: and superstition told that its appearance foreshadowed the approach of calamity, whether of death or other evil, to the Godolphins. The greater the evil that was coming upon them, the plainer and more distinct would be the appearance of the Shadow—the longer the space of time that it would be observed. Rumour went, that once, on the approach of some terrible misfortune, it had been seen for months and months before, whenever the moon was sufficiently bright. The Godolphins did not care to have the subject mentioned to them: in their scepticism, they (some of them, at least) treated it with ridicule, or else with silence. But, like disbelievers of a different sort, the scepticism was more in profession than in heart. The Godolphins, in their inmost soul, would cower at the appearance of that shadowed bier; as those others have been known to cower, in their anguish, at the approach of the shadow of death.

This was not all the superstition attaching to Ashlydyat: but you will probably deem this quite enough for the present. And we have to return to Mrs. Godolphin.

Five years before the present time, when pretty Cecilia was in her fifteenth year, and most needed the guidance of a mother, Mrs. Godolphin died. Her illness had been of a lingering nature; little hope in it, from the first. It was towards the latter period of her illness that what had been regarded by four-fifths of Prior's Ash as an absurd child's tale, a superstition unworthy the notice of the present-day men and women, grew to be talked of in whispers, as something "strange." For three months antecedent to the death of Mrs. Godolphin, the Shadow of Ashlydyat was to be seen every light night, and all Prior's Ash flocked up to look at it. That they went, is of no consequence: they had their walk and their gaze for their pains: but that Mrs. Godolphin should have been told of it, was. She - in the grounds alone one balmy moonlight night, later than she ought to have been, and she discerned people walking in them, making for the ash-trees.

"What can those people be doing here?" she exclaimed to one of her servants, who was returning to Ashlydyat from executing an errand in the town.

"It is to see the Shadow, ma'am," whispered the girl, in answer, with more direct truth than prudence.

Mrs. Godolphin paused. "The Shadow" she uttered. "Is the Shadow to be seen?"

"It has been there ever since last moon, ma'am. It never was so plain, they say."

Mrs. Godolphin waited her opportunity, and, when the intruders had dispersed, proceeded to the ash-trees. It is as well to observe that these ash-trees, and also the Dark Plain, though very near to the house, were not in the more private portion of the grounds.

Mrs. Godolphin proceeded to the ash-trees. An hour afterwards, her absence from the house was discovered, and they went out to search. It was her husband who found her. She pointed to the shadow, and spoke.

"You will believe that my death is coming on quickly now, George." But Mr. Godolphin turned it off with an attempt at joke, and told her she was old enough to know better.

Mrs. Godolphin died. Two years after, Mr. Godolphin came into contact with a wealthy young widow; young, as compared with himself: Mrs. Campbell. He met her in Scotland, at the residence of his first wife's friends. She was English born, but her husband had been Scotch. Mr. Godolphin married her, and brought her to Ashlydyat. The step did not give pleasure to his children. When sons and daughters are of the age that the Godolphins were, a new wife, brought home to rule, rarely does give pleasure to the first family. Things did not go on very comfortably: there were faults on each side; on that of Mrs. Godolphin, and on that of her step-daughters. After a while, a change was made. Thomas Godolphin and his sisters went to reside in the house attached to the bank, a handsome modern residence hitherto occupied by Mr. Crosse. "You had better come here," that gentleman had said to them: he was no stranger to the unpleasantness at Ashlydyat. "I will take up my abode in the country," he continued. "I would prefer to do so. I am getting to feel older than I did twenty years ago, and country air may renovate me."

The arrangement was carried out. Thomas Godolphin and his three sisters entered upon their residence in Prior's Ash, Janet acting as mistress of the house, and as chaperon to her sisters. She was then past thirty: a sad, thoughtful woman, who lived much in the inward life.

Just about the time of this change, certain doings of local and public importance were enacted in the neighbourhood, in which Mr. Godolphin took a prominent share. There ensued a proposal to knight him. He started from it with aversion. His family started also: they and he alike despised these mushroom honours. Not so Mrs. Godolphin. From the moment that the first word of the suggestion was breathed to her, she determined that it should be carried out; for the appellation, my lady, was as incense in her ears. In vain Mr. Godolphin strove to argue with her: her influence was in the ascendant, and he lay under the spell. At length he yielded; and, though hot war raged in his heart, he bent his haughty knee at the court of St. James's, and rose up Sir George.

"After a storm comes a calm." A proverb pleasant to remember in some of the sharp storms of life. Mrs. Godolphin had carried her point in being too many for her step-daughters; she had triumphed over opposition and become my lady; and now she settled down in calmness at Ashlydyat. But she grew dissatisfied. She was a woman who had no resources within herself, who lived only in excitement, and Ashlydyat's quietness overwhelmed her with ennui. She did not join in the love of the Godolphins for Ashlydyat. Mr. Godolphin, ere he had brought her home to it, a bride, had spoken so warmly of the place, in his attachment to it, that she had believed she was about to step into some modern paradise: instead of which, she found, as she expressed it, a "cranky old house, full of nothing but passages." The dislike she formed for it in that early moment never was overcome.

She would beguile her husband to her own pretty place in Berwickshire; and, just at first, he was willing to be beguiled. But after he became Sir George (not that the title had anything to do with it) public local business grew upon him, and he found it inconvenient to quit Ashlydyat. He explained this to Lady Godolphin: and said their sojourn in Scotland must be confined to an autumn visit. So she perforce dragged out her days at Ashlydyat, idle and listless.

We warn our children that idleness is the root of all evil; that it will infallibly lead into mischief those who indulge in it. It so led Lady Godolphin. One day, as she was looking from her drawing-room windows, wishing all sorts of things. That she lived in her pleasant home in Berwickshire; that she could live amidst the gaieties of London; that Ashlydyat was not such a horrid old place; that it was more modern and less ugly; that its reception-rooms were lofty, and garnished with gilding and glitter, instead of being low, gloomy, and grim; and that it was situated on an eminence, instead of on a flat, so that a better view of the lovely scenery around might be obtained. On that gentle rise, opposite, for instance—what would be more enchanting than to enjoy a constant view from thence? If Ashlydyat could be transported there, as they carry out wooden houses to set abroad; or, if only that one room, she then stood in, could, with its windows—

Lady Godolphin's thoughts arrested themselves here. An idea had flashed upon her. Why should she not build a pretty summer-house on that hill; a pavilion? The Countess of Cavemore, in this very county, had done such a thing: had built a pavilion on a hill within

view the windows of Cavemore House, and had called it "Lady Cavemore's Folly." Only the week before, she, Lady Godolphin, in driving past it, had thought what a pretty place it looked; what a charming prospect must be obtained from it. Why should she not do the same?

The idea grew into shape and form. It would not leave her again. She had plenty of money of her own, and she would work out her "Folly" to the very top of its bent.

To the top of its bent, indeed! None can tell what a thing will grow into when it is first begun. Lady Godolphin made known her project to Sir George, who, though he saw no particular need for the work, did not object to it. If Lady Godolphin chose to spend money in that way, she might do so. So it was put in hand. Architects, builders, decorators were called together; and the Folly was planned out and begun. Lady Godolphin had done with ennui now; she found employment for her days, in watching the progress of the pavilion.

It is said that the consummation of our schemes generally brings with it a share of disappointment. It did so in this instance to Lady Godolphin. The Folly turned out to be a really pretty place; the views from its windows magnificent; and Lady Godolphin was as enchanted as a child with a new toy. The disappointment arose from the fact that she could not make the Folly her home. After spending a morning in it, or an evening, she must leave it to return to that grey Ashlydyat—the only eyesore to be seen, when gazing from the Folly's windows. If a day turned out wet, she could not walk to the Folly; if she was expecting visitors she must stay at home to receive them; if Sir George felt ill—and his health was then beginning to suffer—she could not leave him for her darling Folly. It was darling because it was new: in six months' time, Lady Godolphin would have grown tired of it; have rarely entered it: but in her present mood, it was all-in-all to her.

Slowly she formed the resolution to enlarge the Folly—slowly for her, for she deliberated upon it for two whole days. She would add "a reception-room or two," "a bedroom or two," "a kitchen," so that she might be enabled, when she chose to do so, to take up her abode in it for a week. And these additions were begun.

But they did not end; did not end as she had intended. As the Folly grew, so grew the ideas of Lady Godolphin: there must be a suite of reception-rooms, there must be several bedrooms, there must be domestic offices in proportion. Sir George told her that she would spend a fortune upon it; my lady answered that, at any rate, she should have something to show for the outlay.

At length it was completed: and Lady Godolphin's Folly—for it retained its appellation—stood out to the view of Prior's Ash, which it overlooked; to the view of Ashlydyat; to the view of the country generally, as a fair, moderate-sized, attractive residence, built in the villa style, its white walls dazzling the eye when the sun shone upon them.

"We will reside there, and let Ashlydyat," said Lady Godolphin to her husband.

"Reside at the Folly! Leave Ashlydyat!" he repeated, in consternation. "It could not be."

"It will be," she added, with a half self-willed, half-caressing laugh. "Why could it not be?"

Sir George fell into a reverie. He admired the modern conveniences of the Folly, greatly admired the lovely scenery, that, look from which room of it he would, charmed his eye. But for one thing, he had been content to do as she wished, and go to live there. That one thing— what was it? Hear the low-breathed, reluctant words he is beginning to say to Lady Godolphin.

"There is an old tradition in our family—a superstition I suppose you will call it—that if the Godolphins leave Ashlydyat, their ruin is at hand."

Lady Godolphin stared at him in amazement. Nothing had surprised her on her arrival at Ashlydyat, like the stories of marvel which she had been obliged to hear. Sir George had cast ridicule on them, if alluded to in his presence; therefore, when the above words dropped from him, she could only wonder. You might search a town through and not find one less prone to superstition than was Lady Godolphin: in all that belonged to it, she was a very heathen. Sir George hastened to explain away his words.

"The tradition is nothing, and I regard it as nothing. That such a one has been handed down is certain, and it may have given rise to the reluctance, which the early Godolphins entertained, to quit Ashlydyat. But that is not our reason: in remaining in it, we only obey a father's behest. You are aware that Ashlydyat is not entailed. It is bequeathed by will from father to son; and to the bequest in each will, so far as I have cognizance of the past wills, there has always been appended a clause—a request—I should best say an injunction—never to quit Ashlydyat. 'When once you shall have come into possession of Ashlydyat, guard it as your stronghold: resign it neither to your heir nor to a stranger: remain in it until death shall take you.' It was inserted in my father's will, by which Ashlydyat became mine: it is inserted in mine, which devises the estate to Thomas."

"If ever I heard so absurd a story!" uttered Lady Godolphin in her pretty childish manner. "Do I understand you to say that, if you left Ashlydyat to take up your abode elsewhere, it would be no longer yours?"

"Not that, not that," returned Sir George. "Ashlydyat is mine until my death, and no power can take it from me. But a reluctance to leave Ashlydyat has always clung to the Godolphins: in fact, we have looked upon it as a step impossible to be taken."

"What a state of thralldom to live in!"

"Pardon me. We love Ashlydyat. To remain in it is pleasant; to leave it would he pain. I speak of the Godolphins in general; of those who have preceded me."

"I understand now," said Lady Godolphin resentfully. "You hold a superstition that if you were to leave Ashlydyat for the Folly, some dreadful doom would overtake you. Sir George, I thought we lived in the nineteenth century."

A passing flush rose to the face of Sir George Godolphin. To be suspected of leaning to these superstitions chafed his mind unbearably; he had almost rather be accused of dishonour; not to his own heart would he admit that they might have weight with him. "Ashlydyat is our homestead," he said, "and when a man has a homestead, he likes to live and die in it."

"You cannot think Ashlydyat so desirable a residence as the Folly. We must remove to the Folly, Sir George; I have set my heart upon it. Let Thomas and his sisters come back to Ashlydyat."

"They would not come."

"Not come! They were inwardly rebellious enough at having to leave it."

"I am sure that Thomas would not take up his residence here, as the master of Ashlydyat, during my lifetime. Another thing: we should not be justified in keeping up two expensive establishments outside the town, leaving the house at the bank to lie idle. People might lose confidence in us, if they saw us launching forth into extravagance."

"Oh, indeed! What did they think of the expense launched upon the Folly?" mockingly smiled my lady.

"They know it is your money which has built that; not mine."

"If Thomas and the rest came to Ashlydyat you might let the house attached to the bank."

"It would take a great deal more money to keep up Ashlydyat at than it does the house at the bank. The public might lose confidence in us, I say. Besides, no one but a partner could be allowed to live at the bank."

"You seem to find an answer to all my propositions," said Lady Godolphin, in her softest and sweetest, and least true tone; "but I warn you, Sir George, that I shall win you over to my way of thinking before the paper shall be dry on the Folly's walls. If Thomas cannot, or will not, live at Ashlydyat, you must let it."

In every tittle did Lady Godolphin carry out her words. Almost before the Folly's embellishments were matured to receive them, Sir George was won over to live at it and Ashlydyat was advertised to be let. Thomas Godolphin would not have become its master in his father's lifetime had Sir George filled its rooms with gold as a bribe. His mother had contrived to imbue him with some of the Ashlydyat superstition—to which she had lived a slave—and Thomas, though he did not bow down to it, would not brave it. If ruin was to come—

as some religiously believed—when a reigning Godolphin voluntarily abandoned Ashlydyat, Thomas, at least, would not help it on by taking part in the step. So Ashlydyat, to the intense astonishment of Prior's Ash, was put up in the market for hire.

It was taken by a Mr. Verrall; a gentleman from London. Prior's Ash knew nothing of him, except that he was fond of field sports, and appeared to be a man of money: but, the fact of his establishing himself at Ashlydyat, stamped him, in their estimation, as one worthy to be courted. His wife was a pretty, fascinating woman; her sister, Miss Pain, was beautiful, their entertainments were good, their style was dashing, and they became the fashion in the neighbourhood.

But, from the very first day that the step was mooted of Sir George Godolphin's taking up his residence at the Folly, until that of his removal thither, the Shadow had hovered over the Dark Plain at Ashlydyat.

Part 1. Chapter 3.

THE DARK PLAIN IN THE MOONLIGHT.

The beams of the setting sun streamed into the dining-room at Lady Godolphin's Folly. A room of fine proportions; not dull and heavy, as it is much the custom for dining-rooms to be, but light and graceful as could be wished.

Sir George Godolphin, with his fine old beauty, sat at one end of the table; Lady Godolphin, good-looking also in her peculiar style, was opposite to him. She wore a white dress, its make remarkably young, and her hair fell in ringlets, young also. On her right hand sat Thomas Godolphin, courteous and calm, as he ever was; on her left hand was Bessy, whom you have already seen. On the right of Sir George sat Maria Hastings, singularly attractive in her quiet loveliness, in her white spotted muslin dress with its white ribbons. On his left sat his eldest daughter, Janet. Quiet in manner, plain in features, as was Thomas, her eyes were yet wonderful to behold. Not altogether for their beauty, but for the power they appeared to contain of seeing all things. Large, reflective, strangely-deep eyes, grey, with a circlet of darker grey round them. When they were cast upon you, it was not at you they looked, but at what was within you—at your mind, your thoughts; at least, such was the impression they conveyed. She and Bessy were dressed alike, in grey watered silk. Cecil sat between Janet and Thomas, a charming girl, with blue ribbons in her hair. George sat between his sister Bessy and Maria Hastings. Thomas was attired much as he had been in the morning George had exchanged his hunting clothes for dinner dress.

Lady Godolphin was speaking of her visit to Scotland. Sir George's illness had caused it to be put off, or they would have gone in August it was proposed to proceed thither now. "I have written finally to say that we shall be there on Tuesday," she observed.

"Will papa be able to make the journey in one day?" asked Bessy.

"He says he is quite strong enough to do so now," replied Lady Godolphin. "But I could not think of his running any risk, so we shall stay a night upon the road. Janet, will you believe that I had a battle with Mr. Hastings to-day?"

Janet turned her strange eyes on Lady Godolphin. "Had you, madam?"

"I consider Mr. Hastings the most unreasonable, changeable man I ever met with," complained Lady Godolphin. "But clergymen are apt to be so. So obstinate, if they take up a thing! When Maria was invited to accompany us in August, Mr. Hastings made not a single demur neither he nor Mrs. Hastings: they bought her—oh, all sorts of new things for the visit. New dresses and bonnets; and— a new cloak, was it not, Maria?"

Maria smiled. "Yes, Lady Godolphin."

"People who have never been in Scotland acquire the notion that in temperature it may be matched with the North Pole, so a warm cloak was provided for Maria for an August visit! I called at the Rectory to-day with Maria, after the hounds had thrown off, to tell them that we should depart next week, and Mr. Hastings wanted to withdraw his consent to her going. "Too late in the season," he urged, or some such plea. I told him she should not be frozen; we should be back before the cold weather set in."

Maria lifted her sweet face, an earnest look upon it. "It was not the cold papa thought of, Lady Godolphin: he knows I am too hardy to fear that. But, as winter approaches, there is so much more to do, both at home and abroad. Mamma has to be out a great deal; and this will be a heavy winter with the poor, after all the sickness."

"The sickness has passed," exclaimed Lady Godolphin, in a tone so sharp, so eager, as to give rise to a suspicion that she might fear, or had feared, the sickness for herself.

"Nearly so," assented Miss Godolphin. "There have been no fresh cases since—"

"Janet, if you talk of 'fresh cases' at my table, I shall retire from it," interrupted Lady Godolphin in agitation. "Is fever a pleasant or fitting topic of conversation, pray?"

Janet Godolphin bowed her head. "I did not forget your fears, madam. I supposed, however, that, now that the sickness is

subsiding, your objection to hearing it spoken of might have subsided also."

"And how did the controversy with Mr. Hastings end?" interposed Bessy, to turn the topic. "Is Maria to go?"

"Of course she is to go," said Lady Godolphin, with a quiet little laugh of power, as she recovered her good-humour. "When I wish a thing, I generally carry my point. I would not stir from his room until he gave his consent, and he had his sermon on the table, and was no doubt wishing me at the antipodes. He thought Maria had already paid me a visit long enough for Sir George to have grown tired of her, he said. I told him that it was not his business: and that whether Sir George or any one else was tired of her, I should take her to Scotland. So he yielded."

Maria Hastings glanced timidly at Sir George. He saw the look. "Not tired of you yet, are we, Miss Hastings?" he said, with, Maria fancied, more gallantry than warmth. But fancy, with Maria, sometimes went a great way.

"It would have been a disappointment to Maria," pursued Lady Godolphin. "Would it not, my dear?"

"Yes," she answered, her face flushing.

"And so very dull for Charlotte Pain. I expressly told her when I invited her that Maria Hastings would be of the party."

"Charlotte Pain!" echoed Bessy Godolphin, in her quick way; "is she going with you? What in the world is that for?"

"I invited her, I say," said Lady Godolphin, with a hard look on her bloom-tinted face: a look that it always wore when her wishes were questioned, her actions reflected on. None brooked interference less than Lady Godolphin.

Sir George bent his head slightly towards his wife. "My dear, I considered that Charlotte Pain invited herself. She fished pretty strongly for the invitation, and you fell into the snare."

"Snare! It is an honour and a pleasure that she should come with us. What do you mean, Sir George?"

"An honour, if you like to call it so; I am sure it will be a pleasure," replied Sir George. "A most attractive young woman is Charlotte Pain: though she did angle for the invitation. George, take care how you play your cards."

"What cards, sir?"

"Look at that graceless George! at his conscious vanity!" exclaimed Sir George to the table generally. "He knows who it is that makes the attraction here to Charlotte Pain. Wear her if you can win her, my boy."

"Would Charlotte Pain be one worthy to be won by George Godolphin?" quietly spoke Janet.

"Rumour says she has thirty thousand charms," nodded Sir George. "I never would marry for money, if I were George," cried Cecil indignantly. "And, papa, I do not see so much beauty in Charlotte Pain. I do not like her style."

"Cecil, did you ever know one pretty girl like the 'style' of another?" asked George.

"Nonsense! But you can't call Charlotte Pain much of a girl, George. She is as old as you, I know. She's six and twenty, if she's a day."

"Possibly," carelessly replied George Godolphin.

"Did she ride well to-day, George?" inquired his father.

"She always rides well, sir," replied George.

"I wish I had invited her to dinner!" said Lady Godolphin.

"I wish you had," assented Sir George.

Nothing more was said upon the subject; the conversation fell into other channels. But, when the ladies had withdrawn, and Sir George was alone with his sons, he renewed it.

"Mind, George, I was not in jest when speaking of Charlotte Pain. It is getting time that you married."

"Need a man think of marriage on this side thirty, sir?"

"Some men need not think of it on this side forty or on this side fifty, unless they choose to do so: your brother Thomas is one," returned Sir George. "But they are those who know how to sow their wild oats without it."

"I shall sow mine in good time," said George, with a gay, half-conscious smile. "Thomas never had any to sow."

"I wish you would settle the time and keep it, then," was the marked rejoinder. "It might be better for you."

"Settle the time for my marriage, do you mean, sir?"

"You know what I mean. But I suppose you do intend to marry some time, George?"

"I dare say I shall. It is a thing that comes to most of us as a matter of course; as measles or vaccination," spoke irreverent George. "You mentioned Charlotte Pain, sir: I presume you have no urgent wish that my choice should fall upon her?"

"If I had, would you comply with it?"

George raised his blue eyes to his father. "I have never thought of Charlotte Pain as a wife."

"She is a fine girl, a wonderfully fine girl; and if, as is rumoured, she has a fortune, you might go further and fare worse," remarked Sir George. "If you don't like Charlotte Pain, find out some one else that you would like. Only, take care that there's money with her."

"Money is desirable in itself. But it does not invariably bring happiness, sir."

"I never heard that it brought unhappiness, Master George. I cannot have you both marry portionless women. Thomas has chosen one who has nothing: it will not do for you to follow his example. The world is before you: choose wisely."

"If we choose portionless women, we are not portionless ourselves."

"We have a credit to keep up before the public, George. It stands high; it deserves to stand high; I hope it always will do so. But I consider it necessary that one of you should marry a fortune; I should have been glad that both had done so. Take the hint, George; and never expect my consent to your making an undesirable match, for it would not be given."

"But, if my inclination fixed itself upon one who has no money, what then, sir?" asked bold George carelessly.

Sir George pushed from before him a dish of filberts, so hastily as to scatter them on the table. It proved to his sons, who knew him well, that the question had annoyed him.

"Your inclinations are as yet free, George: I say the world is before you, and you may choose wisely. If you do not; if, after this warning, you suffer your choice to rest where it is undesirable that it should rest, you will do it in deliberate defiance of me. In that case I shall disinherit you: partially, if not wholly."

Something appeared to be on the tip of George's tongue, but he checked it, and there ensued a pause.

"Thomas is to be allowed to follow his choice," he presently said.

"I had not warned Thomas with regard to a choice; therefore he has been guilty of no disobedience. It is his having chosen as he has, that reminds me to caution you. Be careful, my boy."

"Well, sir, I have no intention of marrying yet, and I suppose you will not disinherit me for keeping single," concluded George good-humouredly. He rose to leave the room as he spoke, throwing a

merry glance towards Thomas as he did so, who had taken no part whatever in the conversation.

The twilight of the evening had passed, but the moon shone bright and clear, rendering the night nearly as light as day. Janet Godolphin stood on the lawn with Miss Hastings, when George stepped out and joined them.

"Moon-gazing, Janet!

"Yes," she answered. "I am going on to the ash-trees."

George paused before he again spoke. "Why are you going thither?"

"Because," whispered Janet, glancing uneasily around, "they say the Shadow is there again."

George himself had heard that it was: had heard it, as you know, from Charlotte Pain. But he chose to make mockery of his sister's words.

"Some say the moon's made of green cheese," quoth he. "Who told you that nonsense?"

"it has been told to me," mysteriously returned Janet. "Margery saw it last night, for one."

"Margery sees double, sometimes. Do not go, Janet."

Janet's only answer was to put the hood of her cloak over her head, and walk away. Bessy Godolphin ran up at this juncture.

"Is Janet going to the ash-trees? She'll turn into a ghost herself some time, believing all the rubbish Margery chooses to dream. I shall go and tell her so."

Bessy followed in the wake of her sister. George turned to Miss Hastings.

"Have you a cloak also, Maria? Draw it round you, then, and let us go after them."

He caught her to him with a fond gesture, and they hastened on, down from the eminence where rose the Folly, to the lower ground nearer Ashlydyat. The Dark Plain lay to the right, and as they struck into a narrow, overhung walk, its gloom contrasted unpleasantly with the late brightness. Maria Hastings drew nearer to her companion with an involuntary shiver.

"Why did you come this dark way, George?"

"It is the most direct way. In the dark or in the light you are safe with me. Did you notice Sir George's joke about Charlotte Pain?"

The question caused her heart to beat wildly. "Was it a joke?" she breathed.

"Of course it was a joke. But he has been giving me a lecture upon—upon—"

"Upon what?" she inquired, helping out his hesitation.

"Upon the expediency of sowing my wild oats and settling down into a respectable man," laughed George. "I promised him it should be done some time. I cannot afford it just yet, Maria," he added, his tone changing to earnestness. "But I did not tell him that."

Meanwhile, Janet Godolphin had gained the ash-trees. She quietly glided before them beneath their shade to reach the bench. It was placed back, quite amidst them, in what might almost be called a recess formed by the trees. Janet paused ere turning in, her sight thrown over the Dark Plain.

"Heavens and earth! how you startled me. Is it you, Miss Godolphin?"

The exclamation came from Charlotte Pain, who was seated there. Miss Godolphin was startled also: and her tone, as she spoke, betrayed considerable vexation.

You here, Miss Pain! A solitary spot, is it not, for a young lady to be sitting in alone at night?"

"I was watching for that strange appearance which you, in this neighbourhood, call the Shadow," she explained. "I saw it last evening."

"Did you?" freezingly replied Janet Godolphin, who had an unconquerable aversion to the supernatural sign being seen or spoken of by strangers.

"Well, pray, and where's the Shadow?" interrupted Bessy Godolphin, coming up. "I see nothing, and my eyes are as good as yours, Janet: better, I hope, than Margery's."

"I do not see it to-night," said Charlotte Pain. "Here are more footsteps! Who else is coming?"

"Did you ever know the Shadow come when it was watched for?" cried Janet to Bessy, in a half-sad, half-resentful tone, as her brother and Maria Hastings approached. "Watch for it, and it does not come. It never yet struck upon the sight of any one, but it did so unexpectedly."

"As it did upon me last night," said Charlotte Pain. "It was a strange-looking shadow: but, as to its being supernatural, the very supposition is ridiculous. I beg your pardon, if I offend your prejudices, Miss Godolphin."

"Child! why did you come?" cried Janet Godolphin to Maria.

"I had no idea you did not wish me to come."

"Wish! It is not that. But you are little more than a child, and might be spared these sights."

There appeared to be no particular sight to spare any one. They stood in a group, gazing eagerly. The Dark Plain was stretched out before them, the bare patch of clear ground, the archway behind; all bright in the moonlight. No shadow or shade was to be seen. Charlotte Pain moved to the side of George Godolphin.

"You told me I was fanciful this morning, when I said the Dark Plain put me in mind of a graveyard," she said to him in a half-whisper.

"See it now! Those low bushes scattered about look precisely like grave-mounds."

"But we know them to be bushes," returned George.

"That is not the argument. I say they look like it. If you brought a stranger here first by moonlight, and asked him what the Plain was, he would say a graveyard."

"Thus it has ever been!" murmured Janet Godolphin to herself. "At the first coming of the Shadow, it will be here capriciously; visible one night, invisible the next: betokening that the evil has not yet arrived, that it is only hovering! You are sure you saw it, Miss Pain?"

"I am quite sure that I saw a shadow, bearing a strange and distinct form, there, in front of the archway. But I am equally sure it is to be accounted for by natural causes. But that my eyes tell me there is no building, or sign of building above the Dark Plain, I should say it was cast from thence. Some fairies, possibly, may be holding up a sheet there," she carelessly added, "playing at magic lantern in the moonlight."

"Standing in the air," sarcastically returned Miss Godolphin. "Archimedes offered to move the world with his lever, if the world would only find him a place, apart from itself, to stand on."

"Are you convinced, Janet?" asked George.

"Of what?"

He pointed over the Plain. "That there is nothing uncanny to be seen to-night. I'll send Margery here when I return."

"I am convinced of one thing—that it is getting uncommonly damp," said practical Bessy. "I never stood under these ash-trees in an evening yet, let the atmosphere be ever so cold and clear, but a dampness might be felt. I wonder if it is the nature of ash-trees to exhale it? Maria, the Rector would not thank us for bringing you here."

"Is Miss Hastings so susceptible to cold?" asked Charlotte Pain.

"Not more so than other people are," was Maria's answer.

"It is her child-like, delicate appearance, I suppose, that makes us fancy it," said Bessy Godolphin. "Come, let us depart. If Lady Godolphin could see us here, she would go crazy: she says, you know, that damp brings fever."

They made a simultaneous movement. Their road lay to the right; Charlotte Pain's to the left. "I envy you four," she said, after wishing them good night. "You are a formidable body, numerous enough to do battle with any assailants you may meet in your way, fairies, or shadows, or fever, or what not. I must encounter them alone."

"Scarcely," replied George Godolphin, as he drew her arm within his, and turned with her in the direction of Ashlydyat.

Arrived at Lady Godolphin's Folly, the Miss Godolphins passed indoors; Maria Hastings lingered a moment behind them. She leaned against a white pillar of the terrace, looking forth on the lovely night. Not altogether was that peaceful scene in accordance with her heart, for, in that, warred passionate jealousy. Who was Charlotte Pain, she asked herself, that she should come between them with her beauty; with her— Some one was hastening towards her; crossing the green lawn, springing up the steps of the terrace: and the jealous feeling died away into love.

"Were you waiting for me?" whispered George Godolphin. "We met Verrall, so I resigned mademoiselle to his charge. Maria, how your heart is beating!"

"I was startled when you ran up so quickly; I did not think it could be you," was the evasive answer. "Let me go, please."

"My darling, don't be angry with me: I could not well help myself. You know with whom I would rather have been."

He spoke in the softest whisper; he gazed tenderly into her face, so fair and gentle in the moonlight; he clasped her to him with an impassioned gesture. And Maria, as she yielded to his tenderness in her pure love, and felt his stolen kisses on her lips, forgot the jealous trouble that was being wrought by Charlotte Pain.

Part 1. Chapter 4.

ALL SOULS' RECTORY

At the eastern end of Prior's Ash was situated the Church and Rectory of All Souls—a valuable living, the Reverend Isaac Hastings its incumbent. The house, enclosed from the high-road by a lofty hedge, was built, like the church, of greystone. It was a commodious residence, but its rooms, excepting one, were small. This one had been added to the house of late years: a long, though somewhat narrow room, its three windows looking on to the flowered lawn. A very pleasant room to sit in on a summer's day; when the grass was green, and the flowers, with their brightness and perfume, gladdened the senses, and the birds were singing, and the bees and butterflies sporting.

Less pleasant to-day. For the skies wore a grey hue; the wind sighed round the house with an ominous sound, telling of the coming winter; and the mossy lawn and the paths were dreary with the yellow leaves, decaying as they lay. Mrs. Hastings, a ladylike woman of middle height and fair complexion, stood at one of these windows, watching the bending of the trees as the wind shook them; watching the falling leaves. She was remarkably susceptible to surrounding influences; seasons and weather held much power over her: but that she was a clergyman's wife, and, as such, obliged to take a very practical part in the duties of life, she might have subsided into a valetudinarian.

A stronger gust sent the leaves rustling up the path, and Mrs. Hastings slightly shivered.

"How I dislike this time of year," she exclaimed. "I wish there were no autumn. I dislike to see the dead leaves."

"I like the autumn: although it heralds in the winter."

The reply came from Mr. Hastings, who was pacing the carpet, thinking over his next day's sermon: for it was Saturday morning. Nature had not intended Mr. Hastings for a parson, and his sermons were the bane of his life. An excellent man; a most efficient pastor of a parish; a gentleman; a scholar, abounding in good practical sense;

but not a preacher. Sometimes he wrote his sermons, sometimes he tried the extempore plan; but, let him do as he would, there was always a conviction of failure, as to his sermons winning their way to his hearers' hearts. He was under middle height, with keen aquiline features, his dark hair already sprinkled with grey.

"I am glad the wind has changed," remarked the Rector. "We shall say good-bye to the fever. While that warm weather lasted, I always had my fears of its breaking out again. It was only coquetting with us. I wonder—"

Mr. Hastings stopped, as if lapsing into thought. Mrs. Hastings inquired what his "wonder" might be.

"I was thinking of Sir George Godolphin," he continued. "One thought leads to another and another, until we should find them a strange train, if we traced them back to their origin. Beginning with dead leaves, and ending with—metaphysics."

"What are you talking of, Isaac?" his wife asked in surprise.

A half-smile crossed the thin delicate lips of Mr. Hastings. "You spoke of the dead leaves: that led to the thought of the fever; the fever to the bad drainage; the bad drainage to the declaration of Sir George Godolphin that, if he lived until next year, it should be remedied, even though he had to meet the expense himself. Then the train went on to speculate upon whether Sir George would live; and next upon whether this change of weather may not cause my lady to relinquish her journey; and lastly, to Maria. Cold Scotland, if we are to have a season of bleak winds, cannot be beneficial to Sir George."

"Lady Godolphin has set her mind upon going. She is not likely to relinquish it."

"Mark you, Caroline," said Mr. Hastings, halting in his promenade, and standing opposite his wife; "it is her dread of the fever that is sending her to Scotland. But for that, she would not go, now that it is so late in the year. And for Maria's sake I wish she would not. I do not now wish Maria to go to Scotland."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Hastings.

Mr. Hastings knitted his brow. "It is an objection more easily felt than explained."

"When the invitation was given in the summer, you were pleased that she should accept it."

"Yes; I acknowledge it: and, had they gone then, I should have felt no repugnance to the visit. But I do feel a repugnance to it now, so far as Maria is concerned; an unaccountable repugnance. If you ask me to explain it, or to tell you what my reason is, I can only answer that I am unable to do so. It is this want of reason, good or bad, which has prevented my entirely withdrawing the consent I gave. I essayed to do so, when Lady Godolphin was here on Thursday; but she pressed me closely, and, having no sound or plausible argument to bring forward against it, my opposition broke down."

Mrs. Hastings wondered. Never was there a man less given to whims and fancies than the Reverend Isaac Hastings. His actions and thoughts were based on the sound principle of plain matter-of-fact sense: he was practical in all things; there was not a grain of ideality in his composition.

At that moment a visitor's knock was heard. Mrs. Hastings glanced across the hall, and saw her second daughter enter. She wore her grey cashmere cloak, soft and fine in texture, delicate in hue; a pretty morning dress, and a straw bonnet trimmed with white. A healthy colour shone on her delicate face, and her eyes were sparkling with inward happiness. Very attractive, very ladylike, was Maria Hastings.

"I was obliged to come this morning, mamma," she said, 'when greetings had passed. "Some of my things are still here which I wish to take, and I must collect them and send them to the Folly. We start early on Monday morning; everything must be packed to-day."

"One would suppose you were off for a year, Maria," exclaimed Mr. Hastings, "to hear you talk of 'collecting your things.' How many trunk-loads have you already at the Folly?"

"Only two, papa," she replied, laughing, and wondering why Mr. Hastings should speak so sternly. "They are chiefly trifles that I have come for; books, and other things: not clothes."

"Your papa thought it likely that Lady Godolphin would not now go, as the fine weather seems to be leaving us," said Mrs. Hastings.

"Oh yes, she will," replied Maria. "Her mind is fully made up. Did you not know that the orders had already been sent into Berwickshire? And some of the servants went on this morning?"

"Great ladies change their minds sometimes," remarked Mr. Hastings in a cynical tone.

Maria shook her head. She had untied her bonnet-strings, and, was unfastening her mantle. "Sir George, who has risen to breakfast since Thursday, asked Lady Godolphin this morning whether it would not be late for Scotland, and she resented the remark. What do you think she said, mamma? That if there was nothing else to take her to Scotland, this absurd rumour, of the Shadow's having come again, would drive her thither."

"What's that, Maria?" demanded the clergyman in a sharp, displeased accent.

"A rumour has arisen, papa, that the Shadow is appearing at Ashlydyat. It was seen on Wednesday night. On Thursday night, some of us went to the ash-trees—"

"You went?" interrupted the Rector.

"Yes, papa," she answered, her voice growing timid, for he spoke in a tone of great displeasure. "I, and Miss Godolphin, and Bessy. We were not alone: George Godolphin was with us."

"And what did you see?" eagerly interposed Mrs. Hastings, who possessed more of the organ of marvel in her composition than her husband.

"Mamma, we saw nothing. Only the Dark Plain lying quietly under the moonlight. There appeared to be nothing to see; nothing unusual."

"But that I hear you say this with my own ears, I should not have believed you capable of giving utterance to folly so intense," sternly

exclaimed Mr. Hastings to his daughter. "Are you the child of Christian parents? have you received an enlightened education?"

Maria's eyelids fell under the reproof; and the soft colour in her cheeks deepened.

"That a daughter of mine should confess to running after a 'shadow'!" he continued, really with more asperity than the case seemed to need. But the Rector of All Souls' was one who would have deemed it little less heresy to doubt his Bible, than to countenance a tale of superstition. He repudiated such with the greatest contempt: he never, even though proof positive had been brought before his eyes, could accord to it an iota of credence. "An absurd tale of a 'shadow,' worthy only to be told to those who, in their blind credulity, formerly burnt poor creatures as witches; worthy only to amuse the ears of ignorant urchins, whom we put into our fields to frighten away the crows! And my daughter has lent herself to it! Can this be the result of your training, madam?"—turning angrily to his wife. "Or of mine?"

"I did not run after it from my own curiosity; I went because the rest went," answered poor Maria in her confusion, all too conscious that the stolen moonlight walk with Mr. George Godolphin had been a far more powerful motive to the expedition than the "Shadow." "Miss Pain saw it on Wednesday night; Margery saw it—"

"Will you cease?" broke forth the Rector. "Saw it!" If they said they saw it they must have been labouring under a delusion; or else were telling a deliberate untruth. And you do not know better than to repeat such ignorance! What would Sir George think of you?"

"I should not mention it in his presence, papa. Or in Lady Godolphin's."

"Neither shall you in mine. It is not possible"—Mr. Hastings stood before her and fixed his eyes sternly upon hers—"that you can believe in it?"

"I think not, papa," she answered in her strict truth. To truth, at any rate, she had been trained, whether by father or by mother; and she would not violate it even to avoid displeasure. "I think that my feeling upon the point is curiosity; not belief."

"Then that curiosity implies belief," sternly replied the Rector. "If a man came to me and said, 'There's an elephant out there, in the garden,' and I went forth to see, would not that prove my belief in the assertion?"

Maria was no logician; or she had answered, "No, you might go to prove the error of the assertion." "Indeed, papa, if I know anything of myself, I am not a believer in it," she repeated, her cheeks growing hotter and hotter. "If I were once to see the Shadow, why then—"

"Be silent!" he cried, not allowing her to continue. "I shall think next I am talking to that silly dreamer, Janet Godolphin. Is it she who has imbued you with this tone of mind?"

Maria shook her head. There was an undercurrent of consciousness, lying deep in her heart, that if a "tone" upon the point had been insensibly acquired by her, it was caught from one far more precious to her heart, far more essential to her very existence, than was Janet Godolphin. That last Thursday night, in running with George Godolphin after this tale of the Shadow, his arm cast lovingly round her, she had acquired the impression, from a few words he let fall, that he must put faith in it. She was content that his creed should be hers in all things: had she wished to differ from him, it would have been beyond her power to do so. Mr. Hastings appeared to wait for an answer.

"Janet Godolphin does not intrude her superstitious fancies upon the world, papa. Were she to seek to convert me to them, I should not listen to her."

"Dismiss the subject altogether from your thoughts, Maria," commanded the Rector. "If men and women would perform efficiently their allotted part in life, there is enough of hard substance to occupy their minds and their hours, without losing either the one or the other in 'shadows.' Take you note of that."

"Yes, papa," she dutifully answered, scarcely knowing whether she had deserved the lecture or not, but glad that it was at an end. "Mamma, where is Grace?"

"In the study. You can go to her. There's David!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings, as Maria left the room.

A short, thick-set man had appeared in the garden, giving rise to the concluding remark of Mrs. Hastings. If you have not forgotten the first chapter, you may remember that Bessy Godolphin spoke of a man who had expressed his pleasure at seeing her father out again. She called him "Old Jekyl." Old Jekyl lived in a cottage on the outskirts of Prior's Ash. He had been in his days a working gardener, but rheumatism and age had put him beyond work now. There was a good bit of garden-ground to his cottage, and it was well cultivated. Vegetables and fruit grew in it; and a small board was fastened in front of the laburnum-tree at the gate, with the intimation "Cut flowers sold here." There were also bee-hives. Old Jekyl (Prior's Ash never dignified him by any other title) had no wife: she was dead: but his two sons lived with him, and they followed the occupation that had been his. I could not tell you how many gardens in Prior's Ash and its environs those two men kept in order. Many a family, not going to the expense of keeping a regular gardener, some, perhaps, not able to go to it, entrusted the care of their garden to the Jekyls, paying them a stipulated sum yearly. The plan answered. The gardens were kept in order, and the Jekyls earned a good living; both masters and men were contented.

They had been named Jonathan and David: and were as opposite as men and brothers could well be, both in nature and appearance. Each was worthy in his way. Jonathan stood six feet three if he stood an inch, and was sufficiently slender for a lamp-post: rumour went that he had occasionally been taken for one. An easy-going, obliging, talkative, mild-tempered man, was Jonathan, his opinion agreeing with every one's. Mrs. Hastings was wont to declare that if she were to say to him, "You know, Jonathan, the sun never shone," his answer would be, "Well, ma'am, I don't know as ever it did, over bright like." David had the build of a Dutchman, and was taciturn upon most subjects. In manner he was somewhat surly, and would hold his own opinion, especially if it touched upon his occupation, against the world.

Amongst others who employed them in this way, was the Rector of All Souls'. They were in the habit of coming and going to that or any other garden, as they pleased, at whatever day or time suited their convenience; sometimes one brother, sometimes the other, sometimes one of the two boys they employed, as they might arrange between themselves. Any garden entrusted to their care they were sure to keep in order; therefore their time and manner of doing it was not interfered with. Mrs. Hastings suddenly saw David in the

garden. "I will get him to sweep those ugly dead leaves from the paths," she exclaimed, throwing up the window. "David!"

David heard the call, turned and looked. Finding he was wanted, he advanced in a leisurely, independent sort of manner, giving his attention to the beds as he passed them, and stopping to pluck off any dead flower that offended his eye. He gave a nod as he reached Mrs. Hastings, his features not relaxing in the least. The nod was a mark of respect, and meant as such; the only demonstration of respect commonly shown by David. His face was not ugly, though too flat and broad; his complexion was fair, and his eyes were blue.

"David, see how the leaves have fallen; how they lie upon the ground!"

David gave a half-glance round, by way of answer, but he did not speak. He knew the leaves were there without looking.

"You must clear them away," continued Mrs. Hastings.

"No," responded David to this. "'Twon't be of no use."

"But, David, you know how very much I dislike to see these withered leaves," rejoined Mrs. Hastings in a voice more of pleading than of command. Command answered little with David.

"Can't help seeing 'em," persisted David. "Leaves will wither; and will fall: it's their natur' to do it. If every one of them lying there now was raked up and swept away, there'd be as many down again to-morrow morning. I can't neglect my beds to fad with the leaves-and bring no good to pass, after all."

"David, I do not think any one ever was so self-willed as you!" said Mrs. Hastings, laughing in spite of her vexation.

"I know my business," was David's answer. "If I gave in at my different places to all the missises' whims, how should I get my work done? The masters would be blowing me up, thinking it was idleness. Look at Jonathan! he lets himself be swayed any way; and a nice time he gets of it, among 'em. His day's work's never done."

"You would not suffer the leaves to lie there until the end of the season!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings. "They would be up to our ankles as we walked."

"May be they would," composedly returned David. "I have cleared 'em off about six times this fall, and I shall clear 'em again, but not as long as this wind lasts."

"Is it going to last, David?" inquired the Rector, appearing at his wife's side, and laughing inwardly at her diplomatic failure.

David nodded his usual salutation as he answered. He would sometimes relax so far as to say "Sir" to Mr. Hastings, an honour paid exclusively to his pastoral capacity. "No, it won't last, sir. We shall have the warm weather back again."

"You think so!" exclaimed the Rector in an accent of disappointment. Experience had taught him that David, in regard to the weather, was an oracle.

"I am sure so," answered David. "The b'rometer's going fast on to heat, too."

"Is it?" said Mr. Hastings. "You have often told me you put no faith in the barometer."

"No more I don't: unless other signs answer to it," said David. "The very best b'rometer going, is old father's rheumatiz. There was a sharp frost last night, sir."

"I know it," replied Mr. Hastings. "A few nights of that and the fever will be driven away."

"We shan't get a few nights of it," said David. "And the fever has broken out again."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings. "The fever broken out again?"

"Yes," said David.

The news fell upon the clergyman's heart as a knell. He had fully believed the danger to have passed away, though not yet the sickness. "Are you sure it has broken out again, David?" he asked, after a pause.

"I ain't no surer than I was told, sir," returned phlegmatic David. "I met Cox just now, and he said, as he passed, that fever had shown itself in a fresh place."

"Do you know where?" inquired Mr. Hastings.

"He said, I b'lieve, but I didn't catch it. If I stopped to listen to the talk of fevers, and such-like, where would my work be?"

Taking his hat, one of the very clerical shape, with a broad brim, the Rector left his house. He was scarcely without the gates when he saw Mr. Snow, who was the most popular doctor in Prior's Ash, coming along quickly in his gig. Mr. Hastings threw out his hand, and the groom pulled up.

"Is it true?—this fresh rumour of the fever?"

"Too true, I fear," replied Mr. Snow. "I am on my way thither now; just summoned."

"Who is attacked?"

"Sarah Anne Grame."

The name appeared to startle the Rector. "Sarah Anne Grame!" he repeated. "She will never battle through it!" The doctor raised his eyebrows, as if he thought it doubtful himself; and signed to his groom to hasten on.

"Tell Lady Sarah I will call upon her in the course of the day," called out Mr. Hastings, as the gig sped on its way). "I must ask Maria if she has heard news of this," he continued, in soliloquy, as he turned within the Rectory gate.

Maria Hastings had found her way to the study. To dignify a room by the appellation of "study" in a clergyman's house, would at once

imply that it must be the private sanctum of its master, consecrated to his sermons and his other clerical studies. Not so, however, in the Rectory of All Souls. The study there was chiefly consecrated to litter, and the master had less to do with it, personally, than with almost any other room in the house. There, the children, boys and girls, played, or learned lessons, or practised; there, Mrs. Hastings would sit to sew when she had any work in hand too plebeian for the eyes of polite visitors.

Grace, the eldest of the family, was twenty years of age, one year older than Maria. She bore a great resemblance to her father; and, like him, was more practical than imaginative. She was very useful in the house, and took much care off Mrs. Hastings's hands. It happened that all the children, five of them besides Maria, were this morning at home. It was holiday that day with the boys. Isaac was next to Maria, but nearly three years younger; one had died between them; Reginald was next; Harry last; and then came a little girl, Rose. They ought to have been preparing their lessons; were supposed to be doing so by Mr. and Mrs. Hastings: in point of fact, they were gathering round Grace, who was seated on a low stool solving some amusing puzzles from a new book. They started up when Maria entered, and went dancing round her.

Maria danced too; she kissed them all; she sang aloud in her joyousness of heart. What was it that made that heart so glad, her life as a very Eden? The ever-constant presence there of George Godolphin.

"Have you come home to stay, Maria?"

"I have come home to go," she answered, with a laugh. "We start for Scotland on Monday, and I want to hunt up oceans of things."

"It is fine to be you, Maria," exclaimed Grace, with a sensation very like envy. "You have all the pleasure, and I have to stop at home and do all the work. It is not fair."

"Gracie dear, it will be your turn next. I did not ask Lady Godolphin to invite me, instead of you. I never thought of her inviting me, being the younger of the two."

"But she did invite you," grumbled Grace.

"I say, Maria, you are not to go to Scotland," struck in Isaac.

"Who says so?" cried Maria, her heart standing still, as she halted in one corner of the room with at least half a dozen arms round her.

"Mamma said yesterday she thought you were not: that papa would not have it."

"Is that all?" and Maria's pulses coursed on again. "I am to go:

I have just been with papa and mamma. They know that I have come to get my things for the journey."

"Maria, who goes?"

"Sir George and my lady, and I and Charlotte Pain."

"Maria, I want to know why Charlotte Pain goes?" cried Grace. Maria laughed. "You are like Bessy Godolphin, Grace. She asked the same question, and my lady answered, 'Because she chose to invite her.' I can only repeat to you the same reason."

"Does George Godolphin go?"

"No," replied Maria.

"Oh, doesn't he, though!" exclaimed Reginald. "Tell that to the marines, mademoiselle."

"He does not go with us," said Maria. "Regy, you know you will get into hot water if you use those sea phrases."

"Sea phrases! that is just like a girl," retorted Reginald. "What will you lay me that George Godolphin is not in Scotland within a week after you are all there?"

"I will not lay anything," said Maria, who in her inmost heart hoped and believed that George would be there.

"Catch him stopping away if Charlotte Pain goes?" went on Reginald. "Yesterday I was at the pastry cook's, having a tuck-out

with that shilling old Crosse gave me, and Mr. George and Miss Charlotte came in. I heard a little."

"What did you hear?" breathed Maria. She could not help the question: any more than she could help the wild beating of her heart at the boy's words.

"I did not catch it all," said Reginald. "It was about Scotland, though, and what they should do when they were there. Mrs. Verrall's carriage came up then, and he put her into it. An out-and-out flirt is George Godolphin!"

Grace Hastings threw her keen dark eyes upon Maria. "Do not let him flirt with you," she said in a marked tone. "You like him; I do not. I never thought George Godolphin worth his salt."

"That's just Grace!" exclaimed Isaac. "Taking her likes and dislikes! and for no cause, or reason, but her own crotchets and prejudices. He is the nicest fellow going, is George Godolphin. Charlotte Pain's is a new face and a beautiful one: let him admire it."

"He admires rather too many," nodded Grace.

"As long as he does not admire yours, you have no right to grumble," rejoined Isaac provokingly: and Grace flung a bundle of work at him, for the laugh turned against her.

"Rose, you naughty child, you have my crayons there!" exclaimed Maria, happening to cast her eyes upon the table, where Rose was seated too quietly to be at anything but mischief.

"Only one or two of your sketching pencils, Maria," said Miss Rose. "I shan't hurt them. I am making a villa with two turrets and some cows."

"I say, Maria, is Charlotte Pain going to take that thoroughbred hunter of hers?" interposed Reginald.

"Of course," scoffed Isaac; "saddled and bridled. She'll have him with her in the railway carriage; put him in the corner seat opposite Sir George. Regy's brains may do for sea—if he ever gets there; but they are not sharp enough for land."

"They are as sharp as yours, at any rate," flashed Reginald. "Why should she not take him?"

"Be quiet, you boys!" said Grace.

She was interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Hastings. He did not open the door at the most opportune moment. Maria, Isaac, and Harry were executing a dance that probably had no name in the dancing calendar; Reginald was standing on his head; Rose had just upset the contents of the table, by inadvertently drawing off its old cloth cover, and Grace was scolding her in a loud tone.

"What do you call this?" demanded Mr. Hastings, when he had leisurely surveyed the scene. "Studying?"

They subsided into quietness and their places; Reginald with his face red and his hair wild, Maria with a pretty blush, Isaac with a smothered laugh. Mr. Hastings addressed his second daughter.

"Have you heard anything about this fresh outbreak of fever?"

"No, papa," was Maria's reply. "Has it broken out again?"

"I hear that it has attacked Sarah Anne Grame."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Grace, clasping her hands in sorrowful consternation. "Will she ever live through it?"

Just the same doubt, you see, that had occurred to the Rector.

Part 1. Chapter 5.

THOMAS GODOLPHIN'S LOVE.

For nearly a mile beyond All Souls' Rectory, as you went out of Prior's Ash, there were scattered houses and cottages. In one of them lived Lady Sarah Grame. We receive our ideas from association; and, in speaking of the residence of Lady Sarah Grame, or Lady Sarah Anyone, imagination might conjure up some fine old mansion with all its appurtenances, grounds, servants, carriages and grandeur: or, at the very least, a "villa with two turrets and some cows," as Rose Hastings expressed it.

Far more like a humble cottage than a mansion was the abode of Lady Sarah Grame. It was a small, pretty, detached white house, containing eight or nine rooms in all; and, they, not very large ones. A plot of ground before it was crowded with flowers: far too crowded for good taste, as David Jekyl would point out to Lady Sarah. But Lady Sarah loved flowers, and would not part with one of them.

The daughter of one soldier, and the wife of another, Lady Sarah had scrambled through life amidst bustle, perplexity, and poverty. Sometimes quartered in barracks, sometimes following the army abroad; out of one place into another; never settled anywhere for long together. It was an existence not to be envied; although it is the lot of many. She was Mrs. Grame then, and her husband, the captain, was not a very good husband to her. He was rather too fond of amusing himself, and threw all care upon her shoulders. She passed her days nursing her sickly children, and endeavouring to make one sovereign go as far as two. One morning, to her unspeakable embarrassment, she found herself converted from plain, private Mrs. Grame into the Lady Sarah. Her father boasted a peer in a very remote relative, and came unexpectedly into the title.

Had he come into money with it, it would have been more welcome; but, of that, there was only a small supply. It was a very poor Scotch peerage, with limited estates; and, they, encumbered. Lady Sarah wished she could drop the honour which had fallen to her share, unless she could live a little more in accordance with it. She had much sorrow. She had lost one child after another, until she had only two left, Sarah Anne and Ethel. Then she lost her husband; and, next,

her father. Chance drove her to Prior's Ash, which was near her husband's native place; and she settled there, upon her limited income. All she possessed was her pension as a captain's widow, and the interest of the sum her father had been enabled to leave her; the whole not exceeding five hundred a year. She took the white cottage, then just built, and dignified it with the name of "Grame House;" and the mansions in the neighbourhood of Prior's Ash were content not to laugh, but to pay respect to her as an earl's daughter.

Lady Sarah was a partial woman. She had only these two daughters, and her love for them was as different as light is from darkness. Sarah Anne she loved with an inordinate affection, almost amounting to passion; for Ethel, she did not care. What could be the reason of this? What is the reason why parents (many of them may be found) will love some of their children, and dislike others? They cannot tell you, any more than Lady Sarah could have told. Ask them, and they will be unable to give you an answer. It does not lie in the children: it often happens that those obtaining the least love will be the most worthy of it. Such was the case here. Sarah Anne Grame was a pale, sickly, fretful girl; full of whims, full of complaints, giving trouble to every one about her. Ethel, with her sweet countenance and her merry heart, made the sunshine of the home. She bore with her sister's exacting moods, bore with her mother's want of love. She loved them both, and waited on them, and carolled forth her snatches of song as she moved about the house, and was as happy as the day was long. The servants—they kept only two—would tell you that Miss Grame was cross and selfish; but that Miss Ethel was worth her weight in gold. The gold was soon to be appropriated; transplanted to a home where it would be appreciated and cherished: for Ethel was the affianced wife of Thomas Godolphin.

On the morning already mentioned, when you heard it said that fever had broken out again, Sarah Anne Grame awoke, ill. In her fretful, impatient way, she called to Ethel, who slept in an adjoining room. Ethel was asleep: but she was accustomed to be roused at unseasonable hours by Sarah Anne, and she threw on her dressing-gown and hastened to her.

"I want some tea," began Sarah Anne. "I am as ill and thirsty as I can be,"

Sarah Anne was really of a sickly constitution, and to hear her complain of being ill and thirsty was nothing unusual. Ethel, in her loving nature, her sweet patience, received the information with as much concern as though she had never heard it before. She bent over Sarah Anne, inquiring tenderly where she felt pain.

"I tell you that I am ill and thirsty, and that's enough," peevishly answered Sarah Anne. "Go and get me some tea."

"As soon as I possibly can," said Ethel soothingly. "There is no fire at present. The maids are not up. I do not think it can be later than six, by the look of the morning."

"Very well!" sobbed Sarah Anne—sobs of temper, not of pain. "You can't call the maids, I suppose! and you can't put yourself the least out of the way to alleviate my suffering! You want to go to bed again and sleep till eight o'clock. When I am dead, you'll wish you had been more like a sister to me. You possess rude health yourself, and you can feel no compassion for any one who does not."

An assertion unjust and untrue: as was many another, made by Sarah Anne Grame. Ethel did not possess "rude health," though she was not, like her sister, always ailing; and she felt far more compassion than Sarah Anne deserved.

"I will see what I can do," she gently said. "You shall soon have some tea."

Passing into her own room, Ethel hastily dressed herself. When Sarah Anne was in one of her exacting moods, there could be no more sleep or rest for Ethel. "I wonder," she thought to herself, "whether I could not light a fire, without calling the servants? They had so hard a day's work yesterday, for mamma kept them both cleaning from morning till night. Yes: if I can only find some wood, I'll try to light one."

She went down to the kitchen, hunted up what was required, laid the fire, and lighted it. It did not burn up well. She thought the wood must be damp, and found the bellows. She was on her knees, blowing away at the wood, and sending the blaze up into the coal, when some one came into the kitchen.

"Miss Ethel!"

It was one of the servants: Elizabeth. She had heard movement in the house, and had risen. Ethel explained that her sister felt ill, and tea was wanted.

"Why did you not call us, Miss Ethel?"

"You went to rest late, Elizabeth. See how I have made the fire burn!"

"It is not ladies' work, miss."

"I certainly think ladies should put on gloves when they attempt it," merrily laughed Ethel. "Look at my black hands."

The tea ready, Ethel carried a cup of it to her sister, with some dry toast that they had made. Sarah Anne drank the tea, but turned with a shiver from the toast. She seemed to be shivering much.

"Who was so stupid as to make that? You might know I should not eat it. I am too ill."

Ethel began to think that she did look unusually ill. Her face was flushed, shivering though she was, her lips were dry, her heavy eyes were unnaturally bright. She gently laid her hands, washed now, upon her sister's brow. It felt burning, and Sarah Anne screamed.

"Do keep your hands away! My head is splitting with pain."

Involuntarily Ethel thought of the fever; the danger from which they had been reckoning had passed away. It was a low sort of typhus which had prevailed; not very extensively, and chiefly amidst the poor: the great fear had been, lest it should turn to a more malignant type. About half a dozen deaths had taken place altogether.

"Would you like me to bathe your forehead with water, Sarah Anne?" asked Ethel kindly. "Or to get you some eau-de-Cologne?"

"I should like you to wait until things are asked for, and not to worry me," retorted Sarah Anne.

Ethel sighed. Not for the temper: Sarah Anne was always fractious in illness: but for the suffering she thought she saw, and the half doubt, half dread, which had arisen within her. "I think I had better call mamma," she deliberated to herself. "Though, if she sees nothing unusually the matter with Sarah Anne, she will only be angry with me."

Proceeding to her mother's chamber, Ethel knocked softly. Lady Sarah slept still, but the entrance aroused her.

"Mamma, I do not like to disturb you; I was unwilling to do so: but Sarah Anne is ill."

"Ill again! And only last week she was in bed three days! Poor dear sufferer! Is it her chest again?"

"Mamma, she seems unusually ill. Otherwise I should not have disturbed you. I feared—I thought—you will be angry with me if I say, perhaps?"

"Say what? Don't stand like a statue, Ethel."

Ethel dropped her voice. "Dear mamma, suppose it should be the fever?"

For one startling moment, Lady Sarah felt as if a dagger had pierced her: the next, she turned upon Ethel. Fever for Sarah Anne how dared she prophesy it? A low, common fever, confined to the poor of the town, and which had subsided; or, all but subsided! Was it likely to return again and come up here to attack her darling child? What did Ethel mean by it?

Ethel, the tears in her eyes, said she hoped it would prove to be only an ordinary headache; it was her love for Sarah Anne which awoke her fears. Lady Sarah proceeded to the sick-room; and Ethel followed. Her ladyship was not in the habit of observing caution, and spoke freely of the "fever" before Sarah Anne; apparently for the purpose of casting blame at Ethel.

Sarah Anne did not imbibe the fear; she ridiculed Ethel as her mother had done. For some hours Lady Sarah did not admit it either. She would have summoned medical advice at first, but that Sarah

Anne, in her peevishness, protested she would not have a doctor. Later on she grew worse, and Mr. Snow was sent for. You saw him in his gig hastening to the house.

Lady Sarah came forward to receive him; Ethel, full of anxiety, near her. She was a thin woman, with a shrivelled face and a sharp red nose, her grey hair banded plainly under a close white net cap.

She grasped Mr. Snow's arm. "You must save my child!"

"Higher aid permitting me," the surgeon answered. "Why do you assume it to be fever? For the last six weeks I have been summoned by timid parents to a score of 'fever' cases; and when I have arrived in hot haste, they have turned out to be no fever at all."

"This is the fever," replied Lady Sarah. "Had I been more willing to admit that it was, you would have been sent for hours ago. It was Ethel's fault. She suggested at daylight that it might be fever; and it made my darling girl so angry that she forbid my sending for advice. But she is worse now. Come and see her."

Mr. Snow laid his hand upon Ethel's head with a fond gesture, ere he turned to Lady Sarah. All Prior's Ash loved Ethel Grame.

Tossing upon her uneasy bed, her face flushed, her hair floating untidily about it, lay Sarah Anne, shivering still. The doctor gave one glance at her: it was quite enough to satisfy him that Lady Sarah was not mistaken.

"Is it the fever?" impatiently asked Sarah Anne, unclosing her hot eyelids.

"If it is, we must drive it away again," said the doctor cheerily.

"Why should the fever have come to me?" she rejoined, her tone rebellious.

"Why was I thrown from my horse last year, and broke my arm?" returned Mr. Snow. "These things come to all of us."

"To break an arm is nothing—people always recover from that," irritably answered Sarah Anne.

"And you will recover from the fever, if you will be quiet and reasonable."

"I am so hot! My head is so heavy!"

Mr. Snow, who had called for water and a glass, was mixing a white powder which he had produced from his pocket. She took it without opposition, and then he lessened the weight of bed-clothes, and afterwards turned his attention to the chamber. It was close and hot; the sun, which had just burst forth brightly from the grey skies, shone full upon it.

"You have that chimney stuffed up!" he exclaimed.

"Sarah Anne will not allow it to be open," said Lady Sarah. "She is sensitive to cold, dear child, and feels the slightest draught."

Mr. Snow walked to the chimney, turned up his coat cuff and wristband, and pulled down a bag filled with shavings. Soot came with it, and covered his hand; but he did not mind that. He was as little given to ceremony as Lady Sarah to caution, and he went leisurely up to the wash-hand-stand to remove it.

"Now, if I catch that bag, or any other bag up there again, obstructing the air, I shall attack the bricks next time, and make a good big hole that the sky can be seen through. Of that I give you notice, my lady."

He next pulled down the window at the top, behind the blind; but the room, at its best, did not find favour with him. "It is not airy; it is not cool," he said. "Is there not a better ventilated room in the house? If so, she should be moved into it."

"My room is cool," interposed Ethel eagerly. "The sun never shines into it, Mr. Snow."

It would appear that Ethel's thus speaking must have reminded Mr. Snow that she was present. In the unceremonious manner that he

had laid hands upon the chimney bag, he now laid them upon her shoulders, and marshalled her outside the door.

"You go downstairs, Miss Ethel. And do not come within a mile of this chamber again, until I give you leave to do so."

"I will not be moved into Ethel's room!" interposed Sarah Anne, imperiously and fretfully. "It is not furnished with half the comforts of mine. And it has only a bit of bedside carpet! I will not go there, Mr. Snow."

"Now look you here, Miss Sarah Anne!" said the surgeon firmly. "I am responsible for bringing you well out of this illness; and I shall take my own way to do it. If not; if I am to be contradicted at every suggestion; Lady Sarah may summon some one else to attend you: I will not undertake it."

"My darling, you shall not be moved to Ethel's room," cried my lady coaxingly: "you shall be moved into mine. It is larger than this, you know, Mr. Snow, with a thorough draught through it, if you choose to put the windows and door open."

"Very well," said Mr. Snow. "Let me find her in it when I come up again this evening. And if there's a carpet on the floor, take it up. Carpets were never intended for bedrooms."

He passed into one of the sitting-rooms with Lady Sarah when he descended. "What do you think of the case?" she eagerly asked.

"There will be some difficulty with it," was the candid reply. "Lady Sarah, her hair must come off."

"Her hair come off!" uttered Lady Sarah, aghast. "That it never shall! She has the loveliest hair! What is Ethel's hair, compared with hers?"

"You heard the determination I expressed, Lady Sarah," he quietly said.

"But Sarah Anne will never allow it to be done," she returned, shifting the ground of remonstrance from her own shoulders. "And to do it in opposition to her would be enough to kill her."

"It will not be done in opposition to her," he answered. "She will be unconscious before it is attempted."

Lady Sarah's heart sank. "You anticipate that she will be dangerously ill?"

"In these cases there is always danger, Lady Sarah. But worse cases than—as I believe—hers will be, have recovered from it."

"If I lose her, I shall die myself!" she passionately uttered. "And, if she is to have it badly, she will die! Remember, Mr. Snow, how weak she has always been!"

"We sometimes find that weak constitutions battle best with an epidemic," he replied. "Many a sound one has it struck down and taken off; many a sickly one has struggled through it, and been the stronger for it afterwards."

"Everything shall be done as you wish," said Lady Sarah, speaking meekly in her great fear.

"Very well. There is one caution I would earnestly impress upon you: that of keeping Ethel from the sick-room."

"But there is no one to whom Sarah Anne is so accustomed, as a nurse," objected Lady Sarah.

"Madam!" burst forth the doctor in his heat, "would you subject Ethel to the risk of taking the infection, in deference to Sarah Anne's selfishness, or to yours? Better lose all your house contains than lose Ethel! She is its greatest treasure."

"I know how remarkably prejudiced you have always been in Ethel's favour!" resentfully spoke Lady Sarah.

"If I disliked her as much as I like her, I should be equally solicitous to guard her from the danger of infection," said Mr. Snow. "If you choose to put Ethel out of consideration, you cannot put Thomas Godolphin. In justice to him, she must be taken care of."

Lady Sarah opened her mouth to reply; but closed it again. Strange words had been hovering upon her lips: "If Thomas Godolphin were not blind, his choice would have fallen upon Sarah Anne; not upon Ethel." In her heart that was a sore topic of resentment: for she was quite alive to the advantages of a union with a Godolphin. Those words were suppressed; to give place to others.

"Ethel is in the house; and therefore must be liable to infection, whether she visits the room or not. I cannot fence her round with a wall, so that not a breath of tainted atmosphere shall touch her. I would if I could; but I cannot."

"I would send her from the house, Lady Sarah. At any rate, I forbid her to go near her sister. I don't want two patients on my hands, instead of one," he added in his quaint fashion, as he took his departure.

He was about to get into his gig, when he saw Mr. Godolphin advancing with a quick step. "Which of them is it who is seized?" inquired the latter, as he came up.

"Not Ethel, thank goodness!" responded the surgeon. "It is Sarah Anne. I have been recommending my lady to send Ethel from home. I should send her, were she a daughter of mine."

"Is Sarah Anne likely to have it dangerously?"

"I think so. Is there any necessity for you going to the house just now, Mr. Godolphin?"

Thomas Godolphin smiled. "There is no necessity for my keeping away. I do not fear the fever any more than you do."

He passed into the garden as he spoke, and Mr. Snow drove away. Ethel saw him, and came out to him.

"Oh, Thomas, do not come in! do not come!"

His only answer was to take her on his arm and enter. He threw open the drawing-room window, that as much air might circulate through the house as possible, and stood there with her, holding her before him.

"Ethel! what am I to do with you?"

"To do with me! What should you do with me, Thomas?"

"Do you know, my darling, that I cannot afford to let this danger touch you?"

"I am not afraid," she gently whispered.

He knew that: she had a brave, unselfish heart. But he was afraid for her, for he loved her with a jealous love; - jealous of any evil that might come too near her.

"I should like to take you out of the house with me now, Ethel. I should like to take you far from this fever-tainted town. Will you come?"

She looked up at him with a smile, the colour rising to her face. "How could I, Thomas!"

Anxious thoughts were passing through the mind of Thomas Godolphin. We cannot put aside the conveniences of life; though there are times when they press upon us with an iron weight. He would have given almost his own life to take Ethel from that house: but how was he to do it? No friend would be likely to receive her: not even his own sisters: they would have too much dread of the infection, she might bring with her. He would fain have carried her off to some sea-breezed town, and watch over her and guard her there, until the danger should be over. None would have protected her more honour-ably than Thomas Godolphin. But—those conveniences that the world has to bow down to! how would the step have agreed with them? Another thought, little less available for common use, passed through his mind.

"Listen, Ethel!" he whispered. "It would be only to procure a license, and half an hour spent at All Souls with Mr. Hastings. It could be all done, and you away with me before nightfall."

She scarcely understood his meaning. Then, as it dawned upon her, she bent her head and her blushing face, laughing at the wild improbability.

"Oh, Thomas! Thomas! you are only joking. What would people say?"

"Would it make any difference to us what they said?"

"It could not be, Thomas," she whispered seriously; "it is as an impossible vision. Were all other things meet, how could I run away from my sister, on her bed of sickness, to marry you?"

Ethel was right: and Thomas Godolphin felt that she was so. Punctilios must be observed, no matter at what cost. He held her fondly to his heart.

"If aught of ill should arise to you from your remaining here, I shall blame myself as long as life shall last. My love! my love!"

Mr. Godolphin could not linger. He must be at the bank, for Saturday was their most busy day of all the week: it was market-day at Prior's Ash: though he had stolen a moment to leave it when the imperfect news reached him. George was in the private room alone when he entered. "Shall you be going to Lady Godolphin's Folly this evening, George?" he inquired.

"The Fates permitting," replied Mr. George, who was buried five fathoms deep in business; though he would have preferred to be five fathoms deep in pleasure. "Why?"

"You can tell my father that I am sorry not to be able to spend an hour with him, as I had promised. Lady Godolphin will not thank me to be running from Lady Sarah's house to hers just now."

"Thomas," warmly spoke George, in an impulse of kindly feeling:

"I do hope it will not extend itself to Ethel!"

"I hope not," fervently breathed Thomas Godolphin.

Part 1. Chapter 6.

CHARLOTTE PAIN.

A fine old door of oak, a heavy door, standing deep within a portico, into which you might almost have driven a coach-and-six, introduced you to Ashlydyat. The hail was dark and small, the only light admitted to it being from mullioned windows of stained glass. Innumerable passages branched off from the hail. One peculiarity of Ashlydyat was, that you could scarcely enter a single room in it, but you must first go down a passage, short or long, to reach it. Had the house been designed by any architect with a head upon his shoulders and a little common sense with it, he might have made it a handsome mansion with large and noble rooms. As it was, the rooms were crammed and narrow, cornered and confined; and space was lost in these worthless passages.

In the least sombre room of the house, one with a large modern window (put into it by Sir George Godolphin to please my lady, just before that whim came into her head to build the Folly), opening upon a gravel walk, were two ladies, on the evening of this same Saturday. Were they sisters? They did not look like it. Charlotte Pain you have seen. She stood underneath the wax-lights of the chandelier, tall, commanding, dark, handsome; scarlet flowers in her hair, a scarlet bouquet in her corsage; her dress a rich cream-coloured silk interwoven with scarlet sprigs. She had in her hand a small black dog of the King Charles species, holding him up to the lights, and laughing at his anger. He was snarling fractiously, whether at the lights or the position might be best known to his mistress; whilst at her feet barked and yelped an ugly Scotch terrier, probably because he was not also held up: for dogs, like men, covet what they cannot obtain.

In a dress of pink gauze, with pretty pink cheeks, smooth features, and hazel eyes, her auburn hair interlaced with pearls, her height scarcely reaching to Miss Pain's shoulder, was Mrs. Verrall. She was younger than her sister: for sisters they were: a lady who passed through life with easy indifference, or appeared to do so, and called her husband "Verrall." She stood before the fire, a delicate white Indian screen in her hand, shading her face from the blaze. The room was hot, and the large window had been thrown open. So calm was the night, that not a breath of air came in to stir the wax-lights: the

wind, which you heard moaning round the Rectory of All Souls in the morning, whirling the leaves and displeasing Mrs. Hastings, had dropped at sundown to a dead calm.

"Charlotte, I think I shall make Verrall take me to town with him! The thought has just come into my mind."

Charlotte made no answer. Possibly she did not hear the words, for the dogs were barking and she was laughing louder than ever. Mrs. Verrall stamped her foot petulantly, and her voice rang through the room,

"Charlotte, then do you hear me? Put that horrible little brute down, or I will ring for both to be taken away! One might as well keep a screaming cockatoo! I say I have a great mind to go up to town with Verrall."

"Verrall would not take you," responded Charlotte, putting her King Charles on to the back of the terrier.

"Why do you think that?"

"He goes up for business only."

"It will be so dull for me, all alone!" complained Mrs. Verrall. "You in Scotland, he in London, and I moping myself to death in this gloomy Ashlydyat! I wish we had never taken it?"

Charlotte Pain bent her dark eyes in surprise upon her sister. "Since when have you found out that you do not like Ashlydyat?"

"Oh, I don't know. It is a gloomy place inside, especially if you contrast it with Lady Godolphin's Folly. And they are beginning to whisper of ghostly things being abroad on the Dark Plain!"

"For shame, Kate!" exclaimed Charlotte Pain. "Ghostly things Oh, I see—you were laughing."

"Is it not enough to make us all laugh—these tales of the Godolphins? But I shall convert it into a pretext for not being left alone here when you and Verrall are away. Why do you go,

Charlotte?" Mrs. Verrall added, in a tone which had changed to marked significance. "It is waste of time."

Charlotte Pain would not notice the innuendo. "I never was in Scotland, and shall like the visit," she said, picking up the King Charles again. "I enjoy fine scenery: you do not care for it."

"Oh," said Mrs. Verrall; "it is scenery that draws you, is it? Take' you care, Charlotte."

"Care of what?"

"Shall I tell you? You must not fly into one of your tempers and pull my hair. You are growing too fond of George Godolphin."

Charlotte Pain gave no trace of "flying into a temper;" she remained perfectly cool and calm. "Well?" was all she said, her lip curling.

"If it would bring you any good; if it would end in your becoming Mrs. George Godolphin; I should say well; go into it with your whole heart and energy. But it will not so end; and your time and plans are being wasted."

"Has he told you so much?" ironically asked Charlotte.

"Nonsense! There was one in possession of the field before you, Charlotte—if my observation goes for anything. She will win the race; you will not even be in at the distance chair. I speak of Maria Hastings."

"You speak of what you know nothing," carelessly answered Charlotte Pain, a self-satisfied smile upon her lips.

"Very well. When it is all over, and you find your time has been wasted, do not say I never warned you. George Godolphin may be a prize worth entering the lists for; I do not say he is not: but there is no chance of your winning him."

Charlotte Pain tossed the dog upwards and caught him as he descended, a strange look of triumph on her brow.

"And—Charlotte," went on Mrs. Verrall in a lower tone, "there is a proverb, you know, about two stools. We may fall to the ground if we try to sit upon both at once. How would Dolf like this expedition to Scotland, handsome George making one in it?"

Charlotte's eyes flashed now. "I care no more for Dolf than I care for—not half so much as I care for this poor little brute. Don't bring up Dolf to me, Kate!"

"As you please. I would not mix myself up with your private affairs for the world. Only a looker-on sometimes sees more than those engaged in the play."

Crossing the apartment, Mrs. Verrall traversed the passage that led from it, and opened the door of another room. There sat her husband at the dessert-table, taking his wine alone, and smoking a cigar. He was a slight man, twice the age of his wife, his hair and whiskers yellow, and his eyes set deep in his head: rather a good-looking man on the whole, but a very silent one. "I want to go to London with you," said Mrs. Verrall.

"You can't," he answered.

She advanced to the table, and sat down near him. "There's Charlotte going one way, and you another—"

"Don't stop Charlotte," he interrupted, with a meaning nod.

"And I must be left alone in the house; to the ghosts and dreams and shadows they are inventing about that Dark Plain. I will go with you, Verrall."

"I should not take you with me to save the ghosts running off with you," was Mr. Verrall's answer, as he pressed the ashes from his cigar on a pretty shell, set in gold. "I go up incog. this time."

"Then I'll fill the house with guests," she petulantly said.

"Fill it, and welcome, if you like, Kate," he replied. "But, to go to London, you must wait for another opportunity."

"What a hateful thing business is! I wish it had never been invented!"

"A great many more wish the same. And have more cause to wish it than you," he drily answered. "Is tea ready?"

Mrs. Verrall returned to the room she had left, to order it in. Charlotte Pain was then standing outside the large window, leaning against its frame, the King Charles lying quietly in her arms, and her own ears on the alert, for she thought she heard advancing footsteps; and they seemed to be stealthy ones. The thought—or, perhaps, the wish—that it might be George Godolphin, stealing up to surprise her, flashed into her mind. She bent her head, and stroked the dog, in the prettiest unconsciousness of the approaching footsteps.

A hand was laid upon her shoulder. "Charlotte!"

She cried out—a sharp, genuine cry of dismay—dropped the King Charles, and bounded into the room. The intruder followed her.

"Why, Dolf!" uttered Mrs. Verrall in much astonishment. "Is it you?"

"It is not my ghost," replied the gentleman, holding out his hand. He was a little man, with fair hair, this Mr. Rodolf Pain, cousin to the two ladies. "Did I alarm you, Charlotte?"

"Alarm me!" she angrily rejoined. "You must have sprung from the earth."

"I have sprung from the railway station. Where is Verrall?"

"Why have you come down so unexpectedly?" exclaimed Mrs. Verrall.

"To see Verrall. I return to-morrow."

"Verrall goes up to-morrow night."

"I know he does. And that is why I have come down."

"You might have waited to see him in London," said Charlotte, her equanimity not yet restored.

"It was necessary for me to see him before he reached London. Where shall I find him, Mrs. Verrall?"

"In the dining-room," Mrs. Verrall replied. "What can you want with him so hurriedly?"

"Business," laconically replied Rodolf Pain, as he left the room in search of Mr. Verrall.

It was not the only interruption. Ere two minutes had elapsed, Lady Godolphin was shown in, causing Mrs. Verrall and her sister almost as much surprise as did the last intruder. She had walked over from the Folly, attended by a footman, and some agitation peeped out through her usual courtly suavity of manner, as she asked whether Charlotte Pain could be ready to start for Scotland on the morrow, instead of on Monday.

"To-morrow will be Sunday!" returned Charlotte.

"I do not countenance Sunday travelling, if other days can be made use of," continued Lady Godolphin. "But there are cases where it is not only necessary, but justifiable; when we are glad to feel the value of those Divine words, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.' Fever has broken out again, and I shall make use of to-morrow to escape from it. We start in the morning."

"I shall be ready and willing to go," replied Charlotte.

"It has appeared at Lady Sarah Grame's," added Lady Godolphin. "one of the most unlikely homes it might have been expected to visit. After this, none of us can feel safe. Were that fever to attack Sir George, his life, in his present reduced state, would not be worth an hour's purchase."

The dread of fever had been strong upon Lady Godolphin from the first; but never had it been so keen as now. Some are given to this dread in an unwonted degree: whilst an epidemic lasts (of whatever nature it may be) they live in a constant state of fear and pain. It is death they fear: being sent violently to the unknown life to come. I

know of only one remedy for this: to be at peace with God: death or life are alike then. Lady Godolphin had not found it.

"Will Mr. Hastings permit his daughter to travel on a Sunday?" exclaimed Mrs. Verrall, the idea suddenly occurring to her, as Lady Godolphin was leaving.

"That is my business," was my lady's frigid answer. It has been said that she brooked not interference in the slightest degree.

It certainly could not be called the business of Mr. Hastings. For the travellers were far away from Prior's Ash the next morning before he had received an inkling of the departure,

Part I. Chapter 7.

BROOMHEAD

The contrast between them was great. You could see it most remarkably as they sat together. Both were beautiful, but of a different type of beauty. There are some people—and they bear a very large proportion to the whole—to whom the human countenance is as a sealed book. There are others for whom that book stands open to its every page. The capacity for reading character—what is it? where does it lie? Phrenologists call it, not inaptly, comparison.

There stands a man before you, a stranger; seen now for the first time. As you glance at him you involuntarily shrink within yourself, and trench imaginary walls around you, and say: That man is a bad man. Your eyes fall upon another—equally a stranger until that moment—and your honest heart flows out to him. You could extend to him the hand of confidence there and then, for that man's countenance is an index to his nature, and you *know* that you may trust him to the death. In what part of the face does this index seat itself? In the eyes? the mouth? the features separately? or in the whole?

Certainly in the whole. To judge of temper alone, the eye and mouth—provided you take them in repose—are sure indications; but, to judge of what a man is, you must look to the whole. You don't know precisely where to look for it—any more than do those know who cannot see it at all. You cannot say that it lies in the forehead, the eyebrows, the eyes, or the chin. You see it, and that is the most you can tell. Beauty and ugliness, in themselves, have nothing to do with it. An ugly countenance may, and often does, bear its own innate goodness, as certainly as that one of beauty sometimes bears its own repulsion. Were there certain unerring signs to judge by, the whole human race might become readers of character: but that will never be, so long as the world shall last.

In like manner, as we cannot tell precisely where nature's marks lie, so are we unable to tell where lies the capacity to read them. Is it a faculty? or an instinct? This I do know: that it is one of the great gifts of God. Where the power exists in an eminent degree, rely upon it its possessor is never deceived in his estimation of character. It is born

with him into the world. As a little child he has his likes and dislikes to persons: and sometimes may be whipped for expressing them too strongly. As he grows up, the faculty-instinct—call it what you will—is ever in exercise; at rest when he sleeps; never at any other time.

Those who do not possess the gift (no disparagement to them: they may possess others, equally or more valuable) cavil at it—laugh at it—do not believe in it. Read what people are by their face? Nonsense! *they* know better. Others, who admit the fact, have talked of “reducing it to a science,” whatever that may mean; of teaching it to the world, as we teach the classics to our boys. It may be done, say they. Possibly. We all acknowledge the wonders of this most wonderful age. Fishes are made to talk; fleas to comport themselves as gentlemen monkeys are discovered to be men—or men monkeys—which is it? a shirt is advertised to be made in four minutes by a new sewing machine. We send ourselves in photograph to make morning calls. The opposite ends of the world are brought together by electric telegraph. Chloroform has rendered the surgeon’s knife something rather agreeable than otherwise. We are made quite at home with “spirits,” and ghosts are reduced to a theory. Not to mention other discoveries connected with the air, earth, and water, which would require an F.R.S. to descant upon. Wonderful discoveries of a wonderful age! Compare the last fifty years with the previous fifty years; when people made their wills before going to London, and flocked to the fair to see the learned pig point out the identical young woman who had had the quarrel with her sweetheart the previous Sunday afternoon! It is not my province to dispute these wonders: they may, or may not, be facts; but when you attempt to reduce this great gift to a “science,” the result will be failure. Try and do so. Set up a school for it; give lectures; write books; beat it into heads; and then say to your pupils, “Now that you are accomplished, go out into the world and use your eyes and read your fellow-men.” And the pupil will, perhaps, think he does read them; but, the first deduction he draws, will be the last—a wrong one. Neither art nor science can teach it; neither man nor woman can make it theirs by any amount of labour: where the faculty is not theirs by divine gift, it cannot be made to exist by human skill.

A reader of character would have noted the contrast between those two young ladies as they stood there: he would have trusted the one he would not have trusted the other. And yet, Charlotte Pain had her good qualities also. She was kind-hearted in the main, liberal by

nature, pleasant tempered, of a spirit firm and resolute, fitted to battle with the world and to make good her own way in it. But she was not truthful; she was not high principled; she was not one, whom I—had I been George Godolphin—would have chosen for my wife, or for my bosom friend.

Maria Hastings was eminent in what Charlotte Pain had not. Of rare integrity; highly principled; gentle, and refined; incapable of deceit; and with a loving nature that could be true unto death! But she was a very child in the ways of the world; timid, irresolute, unfitted to battle with its cares; swayed easily by those she loved; and all too passionately fond of George Godolphin.

Look at them both now—Charlotte, with her marked, brilliant features; her pointed chin, telling of self-will; her somewhat full, red lips; the pose of the head upon her tall, firm form: her large eyes, made to dazzle more than to attract; her perfectly self-possessed, not to say free manners!—All told of power; but not of innate refinement. Maria had too much of this refinement—if such a thing may be said of a young and gentle lady. She was finely and sensitively organized; considerate and gentle. It would be impossible for Maria Hastings to hurt wilfully the feelings of a fellow-creature. To the poorest beggar in the street she would have been courteous, considerate, almost humble. Not so much as a word of scorn could she cast to another, even in her inmost heart. The very formation of her hands would betray how sensitive and refined was her nature. And that is another thing which bears its own character—the hand; if you know how to read it. Her hands were of exceeding beauty; long, slender, taper fingers, of delicate aspect from a physical point of view. Every motion of those hands—and they were ever restless—was a word; every unconscious, nervous movement of the frail, weak-looking fingers had its peculiar characteristic. Maria Hastings had been accused of being vain of her hands; of displaying them more than was necessary: but the accusation, utterly untrue, was made by those who understood her but little, and her hands less. Such hands are rare: and it is as well that they are so: for they indicate a nature far removed from the common; a timid, intellectual, and painfully sensitive nature, which the rude world can neither understand, nor, perhaps, love. The gold, too much refined, is not fitted for ordinary uses. Charlotte Pain's hands were widely different: firm, plump, white; not small, and never moving unconsciously of themselves.

These pretty hands resting upon her knee, sat Maria Hastings, doing nothing. Maria—I grieve to have it to say of her in this very utilitarian age—was rather addicted to doing nothing. In her home, the Rectory, Maria was reproved on that score more than on any other. It is ever so with those who live much in the inward life. Maria would fall into a train of thought—and be idle.

Master Reginald Hastings would have lost his bet—that George Godolphin would be in Scotland a week after they arrived there—had he found any one to take it. Ten or eleven days had elapsed, and no George had come, and no news of his intention of coming. It was not for *this*, to be moped to death in an old Scotch country-house, that Charlotte Pain had accepted the invitation of Lady Godolphin. Careless George—careless as to the import any of his words might bear—had said to her when they were talking of Scotland: “I wish you were to be of the party; to help us while away the dull days.” Mr. George had spoken in gallantry—he was too much inclined so to speak, not only to Charlotte—without ever dreaming that his wish would be fulfilled literally. But, when Lady Godolphin afterwards gave the invitation—Sir George had remarked aloud at the family dinner-table that Miss Pain had fished for it—Charlotte accepted it with undisguised pleasure. In point of fact, Mr. George, had the choice been given him, would have preferred having Maria Hastings to himself there.

But he did not come. Eleven days, and no George Godolphin. Charlotte began to lay mental plans for the arrival of some sudden telegraphic message, demanding her immediate return to Prior’s Ash; and Maria could only hope, and look, and long in secret.

It was a gloomy day; not rainy, but enveloped in mist, almost as bad as rain. They had gone out together, after luncheon, these two young ladies, but the weather drove them in again. Charlotte was restless and peevish. She stirred the fire as if she had a spite against it; she dashed off a few bars at the piano, on which instrument she was a skilful player; she cut half the leaves of a new periodical and then flung it from her; she admired herself in the pier-glass; she sat down opposite Maria Hastings and her stillness; and now she jumped up again and violently rang the bell, to order her desk to be brought to her. Maria roused herself from her reverie.

“Charlotte, what is the matter? One would think you had St. Vitus’s dance.”

"So I have—if to twitch all over with the fidgets is to have it. How you can sit so calm, so unmoved, is a marvel to me. Maria, if I were to be another ten days in this house, I should go mad."

"Why did you come to it?"

"I thought it might be a pleasant change. Ashlydyat grows gloomy sometimes. How was I to know my lady led so quiet a life here? She was always talking of 'Broomhead,' 'Broomhead!' I could not possibly suppose it to be so dull a place as this!"

"It is not dull in itself. The house and grounds are charming."

"Oh dear!" uttered Charlotte. "I wonder what fogs were sent for?"

"So do I," laughed Maria. "I should have finished that sketch, but for this mist."

"No saddle-horses!" went on Charlotte. "I shall forget how to ride. I never heard of such a thing as a country-house without saddle-horses. Where was the use of bringing my new cap and habit? Only to have them crushed!"

Maria seemed to have relapsed into thought. She made no reply. Presently Charlotte began again.

"I wish I had my dogs here! Lady Godolphin would not extend the invitation even to King Charlie. She said she did not like dogs. What a heathen she must be! If I could only see my darling pet, King Charlie! Kate never mentioned him once in her letter this morning!"

The words aroused Maria to animation. "Did you receive a letter this morning from Prior's Ash? You did not tell me."

"Margery brought it to my bedroom. It came last night, I fancy, and lay in the letter-box. I do not think Sir George ought to keep that letter-box entirely under his own control," continued Charlotte. "He grows forgetful. Some evenings I know it is never looked at."

"I have not observed that Sir George is forgetful," dissented Maria.

"You observe nothing. I say that Sir George declines daily: both bodily and mentally. I see a great difference in him, even in the short time that we have been here. He is not the man he was."

"He has his business letters regularly; and answers them."

"Quite a farce to send them," mocked handsome Charlotte. "Thomas Godolphin is ultra-filial."

"What news does Mrs. Verrall give you?" inquired Maria.

"Not-much. Sarah Anne Grame is out of immediate danger, and the fever has attacked two or three others."

"In Lady Sarah's house?"

"Nonsense! No. That sickly girl, Sarah Anne, took it because spreading to the rest of the house. If they had been going to have it, it would have shown itself ere this. It has crept on to those pests of cottages by the Pollards. The Bonds are down with it."

"The worst spot it could have got to!" exclaimed Maria. "Those cottages are unhealthy at the best of times."

"They had a dinner-party on Saturday," continued Charlotte.

"At the cottages!"

Charlotte laughed. "At Ashlydyat. The Godolphins were there. At least, she mentioned Bessy, and your chosen cavalier, Mr. George."

Maria's cheek flushed crimson. Charlotte Pain was rather fond of this kind of satire. Had she believed there was anything serious between George Godolphin and Maria, she would have bitten her tongue out rather than allude to it. It was not Charlotte's intention to spare him to Maria Hastings.

Charlotte Pain at length settled herself to her desk. Maria drew nearer to the fire, and sat looking into it, her cheek leaning on her hand: sat there until the dusk of the winter's afternoon fell upon the room. She turned to her companion

"Can you see, Charlotte?"

"Scarcely. I have just finished."

A few minutes, and Charlotte folded her letters. Two. The one was directed to Mrs. Verrall; the other to Rodolf Pain, Esquire.

"I shall go up to dress," she said, locking her desk.

"There's plenty of time," returned Maria. "I wonder where Sir George and Lady Godolphin are? They did not intend to stay out so late."

"Oh, when those ancient codgers get together, talking of their past times and doings, they take no more heed how time goes than we do at a ball," carelessly spoke Charlotte.

Maria laughed. "Lucky for you, Charlotte, that Lady Godolphin is not within hearing. 'Ancient codgers!'"

Charlotte left the room, carrying her letters with her. Maria sat on, some time longer-and then it occurred to her to look at her watch. A quarter to five.

A quarter to five! Had she been asleep? No, only dreaming. She started up, threw wide the door, and was passing swiftly into the dark ante-chamber. The house had not been lighted, and the only light came from the fire behind Maria—revealing her clearly enough, but rendering that ante-chamber particularly dark. Little wonder, then, that she gave a scream when she found herself caught in some one's arms, against whom she had nearly run.

"Is it you, Sir George? I beg your pardon."

Not Sir George. Sir George would not have held her to him with that impassioned fervour. Sir George would not have taken those fond kisses from her lips. It was another George, just come in from his' long day's journey. He pressed his face, cold from the fresh night air, upon her warm one. "My dearest! I knew you would be the first to welcome me!"

Dark enough around, it was still; but a light as of some sunny Eden, illumined the heart of Maria Hastings. The shock of joy was indeed great. Every vein was throbbing, every pulse tingling, and George Godolphin, had he never before been sure that her deep and entire love was his, must have known it then.

A servant was heard approaching with lights. George Godolphin turned to the fire, and Maria turned and stood near him.

"Did any of you expect me?" he inquired.

"Oh no!" impulsively answered Maria. "I can scarcely now believe that it is you in reality."

He looked at her and laughed; his gay laugh as much as to say that he had given her a tolerable proof of his reality. She stood, in her pretty, timid manner, before the fire, her eyelids drooping, and the flame lighting up her fair face.

"Is my father at home?" he asked, taking off his overcoat. He had walked from the railway station, a mile or two distant,

"He went out with Lady Godolphin this morning to pay a visit to some old friends. I thought they would have returned long before this."

"Is he getting strong, Maria?"

Maria thought of what Charlotte Pain had said, and hesitated. "He appears to me to be better than when we left Prior's Ash. But he is far from strong."

The servant finished lighting the chandelier and retired. George Godolphin watched the door close, and then drew Maria before him, gazing down at her.

"Let me look at you, my darling? Are you glad to see me?" Glad to see him! The tears nearly welled up with the intensity of her emotion. "I had begun to think you were not coming at all," she said, in a low tone. "Charlotte Pain received a letter from Mrs. Verrall this morning, in which you were mentioned as—"

Charlotte herself interrupted the conclusion of the sentence. She came in, dressed for dinner. George turned to greet her, his manner warm; his hands outstretched.

"Margery said Mr. George was here! I did not believe her!" cried Charlotte, resigning her hands to him. "Did you come on the telegraph-wires?"

"They would not have brought me quickly enough to *your* presence," cried Mr. George.

Charlotte laughed gaily. "I was just prophesying you would not come at all. Mrs. Verrall did not inform me that you were about to start, amidst her other items of intelligence. Besides, I know that you are rather addicted to forgetting your promises."

"What items had Mrs. Verrall to urge against me?" demanded George.

"I forget them now. Nothing I believe. Is Prior's Ash alive still?"

"It was, when I left it."

"And the fever, George?" inquired Maria.

"Fever? Oh, I don't know much about it."

"As if fevers were in his way!" ironically cried Charlotte Pain. "He troubles himself no more about fevers than does Lady Godolphin."

"Than Lady Godolphin would like to do, I suppose you mean, Miss Pain?" he rejoined.

Maria was looking at him wistfully—almost reproachfully. He saw it, and turned to her with a smile. "Has it in truth attacked the cottages down by the Pollards?" she asked.

George nodded. He was not so ignorant as he appeared to be. "Poor Bond had it first; and now two of his children are attacked. I understand Mr. Hastings declares it is a judgment upon the town, for not looking better after the hovels and the drainage."

"Has Bond recovered?" asked Maria.

"Not recovered?" she exclaimed quickly.

"He is dead, Maria."

She clasped her hands, shocked at the news. "Dead. Leaving that large, helpless family! And Sarah Anne Grame?—is she out of danger?"

"From the violence of the fever. But she is in so dangerously weak a state from its effects, that it will be next to a miracle if she recovers. Lady Sarah is half out of her mind. She had prayers put up for Sarah Anne on Sunday. Pretty Ethel has escaped! to the delight of Prior's Ash in general, and of Thomas in particular. What carriage is that?" suddenly broke off George, as the sound of one approaching was heard.

It proved to be Sir George's, bringing home himself and my lady. George hastened to meet them as they entered the hall, his handsome face glowing, his bright chestnut hair taking a golden tinge in the lamp-light, his hands held out. "My dear father!"

The old knight, with a cry of glad surprise, caught the hands, and pressed them to his heart. My lady advanced with her welcome. She bent her tinted cheek forwards, by way of greeting, and Mr. George touched it with his delicate lips—lightly, as became its softened bloom.

"So you have found your way to us, George! I expected you would have done so before."

"Did you, madam?"

"Did we?" cried the knight, taking up the word. "Listen to that vain George? He pretends to ignore the fact that there was an attraction here. Had a certain young lady remained at Prior's Ash, I expect you would not have given us much of your company at Broomhead. If Miss Charlotte—"

"Did you call me, Sir George?" interrupted Charlotte, tripping forward from the back of the hall, where she and Maria stood, out of sight, but within hearing.

"No, my dear, I did not call you," replied Sir George Godolphin.

;

Part 1. Chapter 8.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

Seated on a camp-stool, amidst a lovely bit of woodland scenery, was Maria Hastings. The day, beautifully bright, was warm as one in September; delightful for the pleasure-seekers at Broomhead, but bad for the fever at Prior's Ash. Maria was putting some finishing touches to a sketch—she had taken many since she came—and Mr. George Godolphin and Charlotte Pain watched her as they pleased, or took sauntering strolls to a distance.

Lady Godolphin was as fond of Broomhead as the Godolphins were of Ashlydyat. Certainly Broomhead was the more attractive home of the two. A fine house of exquisite taste; with modern rooms and modern embellishments; and when she invited the two young ladies to accompany her on a visit to it, she was actuated as much by a sense of exultation at exhibiting the place to them, as by a desire for their companionship, though she did like and desire the companionship. Lady Godolphin, who never read, and never worked; in short, never did anything; was obliged to have friends with her to dissipate her ennui and cheat time. She liked young ladies best; for they did not interfere with her own will, and were rarely exacting visitors.

But she required less of this companionship at Broomhead. There she knew every one, and every one knew her. She was sufficiently familiar with the smallest and poorest cottage to take an interest in its ill-doings and its short-comings; at least, as much interest as it was possible to the nature of Lady Godolphin to take. Old acquaintances dropped in without ceremony and remained the morning with her, gossiping of times past and present: or she dropped into their houses, and remained with them. Of gaiety there was none: Sir George's state of health forbade it: and in this quiet social intercourse—which Charlotte Pain held in especial contempt—the young visitors were not wanted. Altogether they were much at liberty, and went roaming where they would, under the protection of Mr. George Godolphin.

He had now been a week at Broomhead: flirting with Charlotte, giving stolen minutes to Maria. A looker-on might have decided that Miss Pain was the gentleman's chief attraction, for, in public, his

attentions were principally given to her. She may be pardoned for estimating them at more than they were worth: but she could very well have welcomed any friendly wind that would have wafted away Maria, and have kept her away. They knew, those two girls, that their mutual intercourse was of a hollow nature; their paraded friendship, their politeness, rotten at the core. Each was jealous of the other; and the one subject which filled their minds was never alluded to in conversation. Either might have affirmed to the other, "You are aware that I watch you and George; my jealous eyes are upon your every movement, my jealous ears are ever open." But these avowals are not made in social life, and Charlotte and Maria observed studied courtesy, making believe to be mutually unconscious: knowing all the time that the consciousness existed in a remarkable degree. It was an artificial state of things.

"How dark you are putting in those trees!" exclaimed Charlotte Pain.

Maria paused, pencil in hand; glanced at the trees opposite, and at the trees on paper. "Not too dark," she said. "The grove is a heavy one."

"What's that queer-looking thing in the corner? It is like a half-moon, coming down to pay us a visit."

Maria held out her sketch at arm's distance, laughing merrily.

"You do not understand perspective, Charlotte. Look at it now." "Not I," said Charlotte. "I understand nothing of the work. They tried to teach me when I was a child, but I never could make a straight line without the ruler. After all, where's the use of it? The best-made sketch cannot rival its model—nature."

"But sketches serve to remind us of familiar places, when we are beyond their reach," was Maria's answer. "I love drawing."

"Maria draws well," observed George Godolphin, from his swinging perch on the branch of a neighbouring tree.

She looked up at him, almost gratefully. "This will be one of the best sketches I have taken here," she said. "It is so thoroughly

picturesque: and that farm-house, under the hill, gives life to the picture."

Charlotte Pain cast her eyes upon the house in the distance over the green field, to which she had not before vouchsafed a glance. A shade of contempt crossed her face.

"Call that a farm-house! I should say it was a tumble-down old cottage."

"It is large for a cottage; and has a barn and a shed round it," returned Maria. "I conclude that it was a farm some time."

"It is not inhabited," said Charlotte.

"Oh, yes it is. There is a woman standing at the door. I have put her into my sketch."

"And her pipe also?" cried George.

"Her pipe!"

George took his own cigar from his mouth, as he answered. "She is smoking, that woman. A short pipe."

Maria shaded her eyes with her hand, and gazed attentively. "I—really—do—think—she—is!" she exclaimed slowly. "What a strange thing!"

"A Welshwoman married to a Scotch husband, possibly," suggested Charlotte. "The Welsh smoke."

"I'll make her a Welshwoman," said Maria gaily, "with a man's coat, and a man's hat. But, there's—there's another now. George, it is Margery!"

"Yes," said Mr. George composedly. "I saw her go in half an hour ago. How smart she is! She must be paying morning calls."

They laughed at this, and watched Margery. A staid woman of middle age, who had been maid to the late Mrs. Godolphin. Margery

dressed plainly, but she certainly looked smart to-day, as the sun's rays fell upon her. The sun was unusually bright, and Charlotte Pain remarked it, saying it made her eyes ache.

"Suspiciously bright," observed George Godolphin.

"Suspiciously?"

He flirited the ashes from his cigar with his finger. "Suspicious of a storm," he said. "We shall have it, ere long. See those clouds. They look small and inoffensive; but they mean mischief."

Charlotte Pain strolled away over the meadows towards the side path on which Margery was advancing. George Godolphin leaped from his seat, apparently with the intention of following her. But first of all he approached Maria, and bent to look at her progress.

"Make the farm—as you call it—very conspicuous, Maria, if you are going to keep the sketch as a memento," said he.

"Is it not a farm?"

"It was, once; until idleness suffered it to drop through."

"Why should I make it particularly conspicuous?" she continued.

There was no reply, and she looked quickly up. A peculiar expression, one which she did not understand, sat upon his face.

"If we had a mind to cheat the world, Maria, we might do so, by paying a visit to that house."

"In what way?"

"I might take you in Maria Hastings, and bring you out Mrs. George Godolphin."

"What do you mean?" she inquired, completely puzzled.

Mr. George laughed. "The man who lives there, Sandy Bray, has made more couples one than a rustic parson. Some people call him a

public nuisance; others say he is a convenience, as it is three miles to the nearest kirk. He goes by the nickname of Minister Bray. Many a lad and lassie have stolen in there, under cover of the twilight, and in five minutes have come forth again, married, the world being none the wiser."

"Is it the place they call Gretna Green?" inquired Maria in much astonishment.

"No, it is not Gretna Green. Only a place of the same description, and equally serviceable."

"But such marriages cannot be binding!"

"Indeed they are. You have surely heard of the Scotch laws?"

"I have been told that any one can marry people in Scotland. I have heard that the simple declaration of saying you take each other for man and wife constitutes a marriage."

"Yes; if said before a witness. Would you like to try it, Maria?"

The colour mantled to her face as she bent over her drawing. She smiled at the joke, simply shaking her head by way of answer. And Mr. George Godolphin went off laughing, lighting another cigar as he walked. Overtaking Charlotte Pain just as Margery came up, he accosted the latter.

"How grand you are, Margery! What's agate?"

"Grand!" returned Margery. "Who says it? What is there grand about me?"

That shawl displays as many colours as a kaleidoscope. We thought it was a rainbow coming along. Did it arrive in an express parcel last night from Paisley?"

"It isn't me that has money to spend upon parcels!" retorted Margery. "I have too many claims dragging my purse at both ends, for that."

A faithful servant was Margery, in spite of her hard features, and her stern speech. Scant of ceremony she had always been, and scant of ceremony she would remain. In fact, she was given to treating the younger branches of the Godolphins, Mr George included, very much as she had treated them when they were children. They knew her sterling worth, and did not quarrel with her severe manners.

"When you have half a dozen kin pulling at you, 'I want this!' from one, and 'I want that!' from another, and the same cry running through all, it isn't much money you can keep to spend on shawls," resumed Margery. "I was a fool to come here; that's what I was! When the master said to me, 'You had better come with us, Margery,' I ought to have answered, 'No, Sir George, I'm better away.'"

"Well, what is the grievance, Margery?" George asked, while Charlotte Pain turned from one to the other in curiosity.

"Why, they are on at me for money, that's what it is, Mr. George. My lady sent for me this morning to say she intended to call and see Selina to-day. Of course I knew what it meant—that I was to go and give them a hint to have things tidy—for, if there's one thing my lady won't do, it is to put her foot into a pigsty. So I threw on my shawl, that you are laughing at, and went. There was nothing the matter with the place, for a wonder; but there was with them. Selina, she's in bed, ill—and if she frets as she's fretting now, she won't get out of it in a hurry. Why did she marry the fellow? It does make me so vexed!"

"What has she to fret about?" continued George.

"What does she always have to fret about?" retorted Margery. "His laziness, and the children's ill-doings. They go roaming about the country, here, there, and everywhere, after work, as they say, after places; and then they get into trouble and untold worry, and come home or send home for money to help them out of it! One of them, Nick—and a good name for him, say I!—must be off into Wales to those relations of Bray's; and he has been at some mischief there, and is in prison for it, and is now committed for trial. And the old woman has walked all the way here to get funds from them, to pay for his defence. The news has half killed Selina."

"I said she was a Welshwoman," interrupted Charlotte Pain. "She was smoking, was she not, Margery?"

"She's smoking a filthy short pipe," wrathfully returned Margery. "But for that, I should have said she was a decent body—although it's next to impossible to understand her tongue. She puts in ten words of Welsh to two of English. Of course they have no money to furnish for it; it wouldn't be them, if they had; so they are wanting to get it out of me. Fifteen or twenty pounds! My word! They'd like me to end my days in the workhouse."

"You might turn a deaf ear, Margery," said George.

"I know I might; and many a hundred times have I vowed I would," returned Margery. "But there's she in her bed, poor thing, sobbing and moaning, and asking if Nick is to be quite abandoned. The worse a lad turns out, the more a mother clings to him—as it seems to me. Let me be here, or let me be at Ashlydyat, I have no peace for their wants. By word of mouth or by letter they are on at me for ever."

"If 'Nick' has a father, why can he not supply him?" asked Charlotte.

"It's a sensible question, Miss Pain," said the woman. "Nick's father is one of those stinging-nettles that only encumber the world, doing no good for themselves nor for anybody else. 'Minister' Bray, indeed! it ought to be something else, I think. Many a one has had cause to rue the hour that he 'ministered' for them!"

"How does he minister?—what do you mean?" wondered Charlotte.

"He marries folks; that's his ne'er-do-well occupation, Miss Pain. Give him a five-shilling piece, and he'd marry a boy to his grandmother. I'm Scotch by birth—though it's not much that I have lived in the land—but, I do say, that to suffer such laws to stand good, is a sin and a shame. Two foolish children—and many of those that go to him are no better—stand before him for a half-minute, and he pronounces them to be man and wife! And man and wife they are, and must remain so, till the grave takes one of them: whatever their repentance may be when they wake up from their folly. It's just one of the blights upon bonny Scotland."

Margery, with no ceremonious leave-taking, turned at the last words, and continued her way. George Godolphin smiled at the blank expression displayed on Charlotte Pain's countenance. Had Margery talked in Welsh, as did the old woman with the pipe, she could not have less understood her.

"You require the key, Charlotte," said he. "Shall I give it to you? Margery was my mother's maid, as you may have heard. Her sister, Selina, was maid to the present Lady Godolphin: not of late years: long and long before she ever knew my father. It appears the girl, Selina, was a favourite with her mistress; but she left her, in spite of opposition from all quarters, to marry Mr. Sandy Bray. And has, there's no doubt, been rueing it ever since. There are several children, of an age now to be out in the world; but you heard Margery's account of them. I fear they do pull unconscionably at poor Margery's purse-strings."

"Why does she let them do so?" asked Charlotte.

Mr. George opened his penknife and ran the point of it through his cigar, ere he answered. "Margery has a soft place in her heart. As I believe most of us have—if our friends could but give us credit for it."

"How strange the two sisters should live, the one with your father's first wife, the other with his second!" exclaimed Charlotte, when she had given a few moments to thought. "Were they acquainted with each other?—the ladies."

"Not in the least. They never saw each other. I believe it was through these women being sisters that my father became acquainted with the present Lady Godolphin. He was in Scotland with Janet, visiting my mother's family; and Margery, who was with them, brought Janet to that very house, there, to see her sister. Mrs. Campbell—as she was, then—happened to have gone there that day: and that's how the whole thing arose. People say there's a fatality in all things. One would think it must be so. Until that day, Mrs. Campbell had not been in the house for two or three years, and would not be likely to go into it again for two or three more."

"Is Bray a mauvais sujet?"

George lifted his eyebrows. "I don't know that there's much against him, except his incorrigible laziness: that's bad enough when a man has children to keep. Work he will not. Beyond the odds and ends that he gets by the exercise of what he is pleased to call his trade, the fellow earns nothing. Lady Godolphin is charitable to the wife; and poor Margery, as she says, finds her purse drawn at both ends."

"I wondered why Margery came to Scotland," observed Charlotte, "not being Lady Godolphin's maid. What is Margery's capacity in your family? I have never been able to find out."

"It might puzzle herself to tell you what it is, now. After my mother's death, she waited on my sisters: but when they left Ashlydyat, Margery declined to follow them. She would not leave Sir George. She is excessively attached to him, almost as much so as she was to my mother. That quitting Ashlydyat, ourselves first, and then my father, was a blow to Margery," George added in a dreamy tone. "She has never been the same since."

"It was Margery, was it not, who attended upon Sir George in his long illness?"

"I do not know what he would have done without her," spoke George Godolphin in a tone that betrayed its own gratitude. "In sickness she is invaluable: certainly not to be replaced, where she is attached. Lady Godolphin, though in her heart I do not fancy she likes Margery, respects her for her worth."

"I cannot say I like her," said Charlotte Pain. "Her manners are too independent. I have heard her order you about very cavalierly."

"And you will hear her again," said George Godolphin. "She exercised great authority over us when we were children, and she looks upon us as children still. Her years have grown with ours, and there is always the same distance as to age between us. I speak of the younger amongst us: to Thomas and Janet she is ever the respectful servant; in a measure also to Bessy: of myself and Cecil she considers herself partial mistress."

"If they are so poor as to drain Margery of her money, how is it they can live in that house and pay its rent?" inquired Charlotte, looking towards the building.

"It is Bray's own. The land, belonging to it, has been mortgaged three deep long ago. He might have been in a tolerably good position, had he chosen to make the most of his chances: he was not born a peasant."

"Who is this?" exclaimed Charlotte.

A tall, slouching man, with red hair and heavy shoulders, was advancing towards them from the house. George turned to look.

"That is Bray himself. Look at the lazy fellow! You may tell his temperament from his gait."

George Godolphin was right. The man was not walking along, but Sauntering; turning to either side and bending his head as if flowers lay in his path and he wished to look at them: his hands in his pockets, his appearance anything but fresh and neat. They watched him come up. He touched his hat then, and accosted Mr. George Godolphin.

"My service to ye, sir. I didna know you were in these parts."

"So you are still in the land of the living, Bray!" was Mr. George's response. "How is business?"

"Dull as a dyke," returned Bray. "Times are bad. I've hardly took a crown in the last three months, sir. I shall have to emigrate, if this is to go on."

"I fear you would scarcely find another country so tolerant to your peculiar calling, Bray," said George, some mockery in his tone. "And what would the neighbourhood do without you? It must resign itself to single blessedness."

"The neighbourhood dunna come to me. Folk go over to the kirk now: that has come into fashion; and I'm going down. 'Twas different in past times. A man would give a ten-pun note then to have things done neatly and quietly. But there's fresh notions and fresh havers; and, for all the good they have done me, I might as well be out of the world. Is this Miss Cecil?"

The last question was put abruptly, the man turning himself full upon Charlotte Pain, and scanning her face. George Godolphin was surprised out of an answer: had he taken a moment for reflection, he might have deemed the question an impertinence, and passed it by.

Miss Cecilia is not in Scotland."

"I thought it might be her," said the man; "for Miss Cecil's looks are a country's talk, and I have heard much of them. I see now: there's nought of the Godolphin there. But it's a bonny face, young lady: and I dare say there's those that are finding it so."

He shambled on, with a gesture of the hand by way of salutation. Charlotte Pain did not dislike the implied compliment. "How can this man marry people?" she exclaimed. "He is no priest."

"He can, and he does marry them; and is not interfered with, or forbidden," said George Godolphin. "At least, he did do so. By his own account, his patronage seems to be on the decline."

"Did he marry them openly?"

"Well—no; I conclude not. If people found it convenient to marry openly, they would not go to him. And why they should go to him at all, puzzles me, and always has: for, the sort of marriage that he performs can be performed by any one wearing a coat, in Scotland, or by the couple themselves. But he has acquired a name, 'Minister Bray;' and a great deal lies in a name for ladies' ears."

"Ladies!" cried Charlotte scornfully. "Only the peasants went to him, I am sure."

"Others have gone as well as peasants. Bray boasts yet of a fifty-pound note, once put into his hand for pronouncing the benediction. It is a ceremony that we are given to be lavish upon," added George, laughing. "I have heard of money being grudged for a funeral, but I never did for a wedding."

"Were I compelled to be a resident of this place, I should get married myself, out of sheer ennui, or do something else as desperate," she exclaimed.

"You find it dull?"

"It has been more tolerable since you came," she frankly avowed.

George raised his hat, and his blue eyes shot a glance into hers. "Thank you, Charlotte."

"Why were you so long in coming? Do you know what I had done? I had written a letter to desire Mrs. Verrall to recall me. Another week of it would have turned me melancholy. Your advent was better than nobody's."

"Thank you again, mademoiselle. When I promise—"

"Promise," she warmly interrupted. "I have learnt what your promises are worth. Oh, but, George, tell me—What was it that you and Lady Godolphin were saying yesterday? It was about Ethel Grame. I only caught a word here and there."

"Thomas wishes Lady Godolphin would invite Ethel here for the remainder of their stay. He thinks Ethel would be all the better for a change, after being mured up in that fever-tainted house. But, don't talk of it. It was only a little private negotiation that Thomas was endeavouring to carry out upon his own account. He wrote to me, and he wrote to my lady. Ethel knows nothing of it."

"And what does Lady Godolphin say?"

George drew in his lips. "She says No. As I expected. And I believe she is for once sorry to say it, for pretty Ethel is a favourite of hers. But she retains her dread of the fever. Her argument is, that, although Ethel has escaped it in her own person, she might possibly bring it here in her boxes."

"Stuff!" cried Charlotte Pain. "Sarah Anne might do so; but I do not see how Ethel could. I wonder Thomas does not marry, and have done with it! He is old enough."

"And Ethel young enough. It will not be delayed long now. The vexatious question, concerning residence, must be settled in some way."

"What residence? What is vexatious about it?" quickly asked Charlotte, curiously.

"There is some vexation about it, in some way or other," returned George with indifference, not choosing to speak more openly. "It is not my affair; it lies between Thomas and Sir George. When Thomas comes here next week—"

"Is Thomas coming next week?" she interrupted.

"That is the present plan. And I return."

She threw her flashing eyes at him. They said—well, they said a good deal: perhaps Mr. George could read it. "You had better get another letter of recall written, Charlotte," he resumed in a tone which might be taken for jest or earnest, "and give me the honour of your escort."

"How you talk!" returned she peevishly. "As if Lady Godolphin would allow me to go all that way under your escort! As if I would go myself!"

"You might have a less safe one, Charlotte mia," cried Mr. George somewhat saucily. "No lion should come near you, to eat you up."

"George," resumed Charlotte, after a pause, "I wish you would tell me whether Mrs. Verrall— Good Heavens! what's that?"

Sounds of distress were sounding in their ears. They turned hastily. Maria Hastings, her camp-stool overturned, her sketching materials scattered on the ground, was flying towards them, calling upon George Godolphin to save her. There was no mistaking that she was in a state of intense terror.

Charlotte Pain wondered if she had gone mad. She could see nothing to alarm her. George Godolphin cast his rapid glance to the spot where she had sat, and could see nothing, either. He hastened to meet her, and caught her in his arms, into which she literally threw herself.

Entwined round her left wrist was a small snake, or reptile of the species, more than a foot long. It looked like an eel, writhing there.

Maria had never come into personal contact with anything of the sort: but she remembered what had been said of the deadly bite of a serpent; and terror completely overmastered her.

He seized it and flung it from her; he laid her poor terrified face upon his breast, that she might there sob out her fear; he cast a greedy glance at her wrist, where the thing had been: and his own face had turned white with emotion.

"My darling, there is no injury," he soothingly whispered. "Be calm! be calm!" And, utterly regardless of the presence of Charlotte Pain, he laid his cheek against hers, as if to reassure her, and kept it there.

Less regardless, possibly, had he seen Charlotte Pain's countenance. It was dark as night. The scales were rudely torn from her eyes: and she saw, in that moment, how fallacious had been her own hopes touching George Godolphin.

Part 1. Chapter 9.

MR. SANDY'S "TRADE."

"What ever is the matter?"

The interruption came from Lady Godolphin. Charlotte Pain had perceived her approach, but had ungraciously refrained from intimating it to her companions. My lady, a coquettish white bonnet shading her delicate face, and her little person enveloped in a purple velvet mantle trimmed with ermine, was on her way to pay a visit to her ex-maid, Selina. She surveyed the group with intense astonishment. Maria Hastings, white, sobbing, clinging to George Godolphin in unmistakable terror; Mr. George soothing her in rather a marked manner; and Charlotte Pain, erect, haughty, her arms folded, her head drawn up, giving no assistance, her countenance about as pleasant as a demon's my lady had once the pleasure of seeing at the play. She called out the above words before she was well up with them.

George Godolphin did not release Maria; he simply lifted his head. "She has been very much terrified, Lady Godolphin; but no harm is done. A reptile of the snake species fastened itself on her wrist. I have flung it off."

He glanced towards the spot where stood Lady Godolphin, as much as to imply that he had flung the offender there. My lady shrieked, caught up her petticoats, we won't say how high, and leaped away nimbly.

"I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "A snake! What should bring snakes about, here?"

"Say a serpent!" broke from the pale lips of Charlotte Pain.

Lady Godolphin did not detect the irony, and felt really alarmed. Maria, growing calmer, and perhaps feeling half ashamed of the emotion which fear had caused her to display, drew away from George Godolphin. He would not suffer that, and made her take his arm. "I am sorry to have alarmed you all so much," she said. "Indeed, I could not help it, Lady Godolphin."

"A serpent in the grass!" repeated her ladyship, unable to get over the surprise. "How did it come to you, Maria? Were you lying down?"

"I was sitting on the camp-stool, there; busy with my drawing," she answered. "My left hand was hanging down, touching, I believe, the grass. I began to feel something cold at my wrist, but at first did not notice it. Then I lifted it and saw that dreadful thing wound round it. I could not shake it off. Oh, Lady Godolphin! I felt—I hardly know how I felt—almost as if I should have died, had there been no one near to run to."

Lady Godolphin, her skirts still lifted, the tips of her toes touching the path gingerly, to which they had now hastened, and her eyes alert, lest the serpent should come trailing forth from any unexpected direction, remarked that it was a mercy Maria had escaped with only fright. "You seem to experience enough of that," she said. "Don't faint, child."

Maria's lips parted with a sickly smile, which she meant should be a brave one. She was both timid and excitable; and, if terror did attack her, she felt it in no common degree. What would have been but a passing fear to another, forgotten almost as soon as felt, was to her agony. Remarkably susceptible, was she, to the extreme of pleasure and the extreme of pain. "There is no fear of my fainting," she answered to Lady Godolphin. "I never fainted in my life."

"I am on my road to see an old servant who lives in that house," said Lady Godolphin, pointing to the tenement, little thinking how far it had formed their theme of discourse. "You shall come with me and rest, and have some water."

"Yes, that is the best thing to be done," said George Godolphin. "I'll take you there, Maria, and then I'll have a hunt after the beast. I ought to have killed him at the time."

Lady Godolphin walked on, Charlotte Pain at her side. Charlotte's lip was curling.

The house door, to which they were bound, stood open. Across its lower portion, as if to prevent the exit of children, was a board, formerly placed there for that express purpose. The children were

grown now and scattered, but the board remained; the inmates stepping over it at their will. Sandy Bray, who must have skulked back to his home by some unseen Circuit, made a rush to the board at sight of Lady Godolphin, and pulled it out of its grooves, leaving the entrance clear. But for his intense idleness, he, knowing she was coming, would have removed it earlier.

They entered upon a large room, half sitting-room, half kitchen, its boarded floor very clean. The old Welshwoman, a cleanly, well-mannered, honest-faced old woman, was busy knitting then, and came forward, curtsying: no vestige of pipe to be seen or smelt. "Selina was in bed," Bray said, standing humbly before Lady Godolphin. "Selina had heard bad news of one of the brats, and had worried herself sick over it, as my lady knew it was in the stupid nature of Selina to do. Would my lady be pleased to step up to see her?"

Yes; my lady would be pleased to do so by-and-by. But at present she directed a glass of water to be brought to Miss Hastings. Bray brought the water in a cracked yellow cup.

"Eh, but there is some of them things about here," he said, when the cause of alarm was mentioned. "I think there must be a nest of 'em. They are harmless, so far as I know."

"Why don't you find the nest?" asked Mr. George Godolphin.

"And what good, if I did find 'em, sir?" said he.

"Kill the lot," responded George.

He strode out of the house, Bray following in his wake, to look for the reptile which had caused the alarm. Bray was sure nothing would come of it: the thing had had time to get clear away.

In point of fact, nothing did come of it. George Godolphin could not decide upon the precise spot where they had stood when he threw away the reptile; and, to beat over the whole field, which was extensive, would have been endless work. He examined carefully the spot where Maria had sat, both he and Bray, but could see no trace of anything alarming. Gathering up her treasures, including the camp-stool, he set off with them. Bray made a feeble show of offering to

bear the stool. "No," said George, "I'll carry it myself: it would be too much trouble for you."

Charlotte Pain stood at the door, watching as they approached, her rich cheek glowing, her eye flashing. Never had she looked more beautiful, and she bent her sweetest smile upon Mr. George, who had the camp-stool swinging on his back. Lady Godolphin had gone up to the invalid. Maria, quite herself again, came forward.

"No luck," said George. "I meant to have secured the fellow and put him under a glass case as a memento: but he has been too cunning. Here's your sketch, Maria; undamaged. And here are the other rattletraps."

She bent over the drawing quite fondly. "I am glad I had finished it," she said. "I can do the filling-in later. I should not have had courage to sit in that place again."

"Well, old lady," cried George in his free-and-easy manner, as he stood by the Welshwoman, and looked down at her nimble fingers, "so you have come all the way from Wales on foot, I hear! You put some of us to shame."

She looked up and smiled pleasantly. She understood English better than she could speak it.

"Not on foot all the way," she managed to explain. "On foot to the great steamer, and then on foot again after the steamer landed her in Scotland. Not less than a hundred miles of land, taking both ways together."

"Oh, I see!" said George, perceiving that Margery had taken up a wrong impression. "But you must have been a good time doing that?"

"She had the time before her," she answered, more by signs than words, "and her legs were used to the roads. In her husband's lifetime she had oftentimes accompanied him on foot to different parts of England, when he went there with his droves of cattle. It was in those journeys that she learnt to talk English."

George laughed at her idea of talking English. "Did you learn the use of the pipe also in the journeys, old lady?"

She certainly had; for she nodded fifty times in answer, and looked delighted at his divination. "But she was obliged to put up with cheap tobacco now," she said: "and had a trouble to get that!"

George pulled out a supply of Turkey from some hidden receptacle of his coat. "Did she like that sort?"

She looked at it with the eye of a connoisseur, touched it, smelt it, and finally tasted it. "Ah, yes! that was good; very good; too good for her."

"Not a bit of it," said George. "It's yours, old lady. There! It will keep your pipe going, on the road home."

When fully convinced that he meant it in earnest, she seized his hand, shook it heartily, and plunged into a Welsh oration. It was cut short in the midst. She caught sight of Bray, coming in at the house door, and smuggled the present out of sight amidst her petticoats. Had Mr. Sandy seen it, she might have derived little benefit from it herself.

Time lagged, while they waited for Lady Godolphin. The conversation fell upon Bray's trade—as the man was wont to call it: though who or what led to the topic none of them could remember. He recounted two or three interesting incidents; one, of a gentleman marrying a young wife and being shot dead the next day by her friends. She was an heiress, and they had run away from Ireland. But that occurred years and years ago, he added. Would the ladies like to see the room?

He opened a-door at the back of the kitchen, traversed a passage, and entered a small place, which could only be called a room by courtesy. They followed, wonderingly. The walls were whitewashed, the floor was of brick, and the small skylight, by which it was lighted, was of thick coarse glass, embellished with green nobs. What with the lowering sky, and this lowering window, the room wore an appearance of the gloomiest twilight. No furniture was in it, except a table (or something that served for one) covered with a green baize cloth, on which lay a book. The contrast from the kitchen, bright with

its fire, with the appliances of household life, to this strange comfortless place made them shiver. "A fit place for the noose to be tied in!" cried irreverent George, surveying it critically.

Bray took the words literally. "Yes," said he. "It's kept for that purpose alone. It is a bit out of the common, and that pleases the women. If I said the words in my kitchen, it might not be so satisfying to them, ye see. It does not take two minutes to do," he added, taking his stand behind the table and opening the book. "I wish I had as many pieces of gold as I have done it, here, in my time."

Charlotte Pain took up the words defiantly. "It is impossible that such a marriage can stand. It is not a marriage."

"Deed, but it is, young lady."

"It cannot be legal," she haughtily rejoined. "If it stands good for this loose-lawed country, it cannot do so for others."

"Ay, how about that?" interrupted George, still in his light tone of ridicule. "Would it hold good in England?"

Minister Bray craned his long neck towards them, over the table, where they stood in a group. He took the hand of George Godolphin, and that of Charlotte Pain, and put them to together. "Ye have but to say, 'I take you, young lady, to be my lawful wife;' and, 'I take you, sir, to be my husband,' in your right names. I'd then pronounce ye man and wife, and say the blessing on it; and the deed would be done, and hold good all over the world."

Did Mr. Sandy Bray anticipate that he might thus extemporise an impromptu ceremony, which should bring some grist to his empty mill? Not improbably: for he did not release their hands, but kept them joined together, looking at both in silence.

George Godolphin was the first to draw his hand away. Charlotte had only stared with wondering eyes, and she now burst into a laugh of ridicule. "Thank you for your information," said Mr. George. "There's no knowing, Bray, but I may call your services into requisition some time."

"Where are you?" came the soft voice of Lady Godolphin down the passage. "We must all hurry home: it is going to rain. Charlotte, are you there? Where have you all gone to? Charlotte, I say?"

Charlotte hastened out. Lady Godolphin took her arm at once, and walked with a quick step through the kitchen into the open air, nodding adieu to the old Welshwoman. My lady herself, her ermine, her velvets, possibly her delicately-bloomed complexion, all shrank from the violence of a storm. Storms, neither of life nor of weather, had ever come too near Lady Godolphin. She glanced upward at the threatening and angry sky, and urged Charlotte on.

"Can you walk fast? So lovely a morning as it was!"

"Here comes one of the servants," exclaimed Charlotte. "With umbrellas, no doubt. How he runs!"

My lady lifted her eyes. Advancing towards them with fleet foot, as if he were running for a wager, came a man in the Godolphin livery. If umbrellas had been the object of his coming, he must have dropped them on his way, for his arms swung beside him, and his hands were empty.

"My lady," cried the man, almost as much out of breath as Lady Godolphin: "Sir George is taken ill."

My lady stopped then. "Ill!" she repeated. "Ill in what way?"

"Margery has just found him lying on the floor of his room, my lady.

We have got him on to the bed, but he appears to be quite insensible. Andrew has gone for the doctor."

"Hasten to the house there, and acquaint Mr. George Godolphin," said my lady, pointing to Bray's.

But Charlotte had already gone on the errand. She left Lady Godolphin's arm and started back-with all speed, calling out that she would inform Mr. George Godolphin. My lady, on her part, had sped on in the direction of Broomhead, with a fleeter foot than before.

Leaving the man standing where he was. "Which of the two am I to follow, I wonder?" he soliloquized. "I suppose I had better keep up with my lady."

When Charlotte Pain had left Mr. Sandy Bray's match-making room, at my lady's call, George Godolphin turned with a rapid, impulsive motion to Maria Hastings, caught her hand, and drew her beside him, as he stood before Bray "Maria, she will fetter me in spite of myself!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Let me put it out of her power."

Maria looked at him inquiringly. Well she might!

"Be mine now; here," he rapidly continued, bending his face so that she alone might hear. "I swear that I never will presume upon the act, until it can be more legally solemnized. But it will bind us to each other beyond the power of man or woman to set aside."

Maria turned red, pale, any colour that you will, and quietly drew her hand from that of Mr. George Godolphin. "I do not quite know whether you are in earnest or in jest, George. You will allow me to infer the latter."

Quiet as were the words, calm as was the manner, there was that about her which unmistakably showed Mr. George Godolphin that he might not venture further to forget himself; if, indeed, he had not been in jest. Maria, a true gentlewoman at heart, professed to assume that he had been.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "Nay, let me make my peace, Maria." And he took her hand again, and held it in his. Minister Bray leaned towards them with an earnest face. Resigning the hope of doing any little stroke of business on his own account, he sought to obtain some information on a different subject.

"Sir, would ye be pleased to tell me a trifle about your criminal laws, over the border? One of my ne'er-do-weels has been getting into trouble there, and they may make him smart for it."

George Godolphin knew that he alluded to the ill-starred Nick. "What are the circumstances?" he asked. "I will tell you what I can."

Sandy entered upon the story. They stood before him, absorbed in it, for Maria also listened with interest, when an exclamation caused them to turn. Maria drew her hand from George Godolphin's with a quick gesture. There stood Charlotte Pain.

Stood with a white face, and a flashing, haughty eye. "We are coming instantly," said George. "We shall catch you up." For he thought she had reappeared to remind them.

"It is well," she answered. "And it may be as well to haste, Mr. George Godolphin, if you would see your father alive."

"What?" he answered. But Charlotte had turned again and was gone like the wind. With all his speed, he could not catch her up until they had left the house some distance behind them.

Part 1. Chapter 10.

THE SHADOW.

In the heart of the town of Prior's Ash was situated the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Built at the corner of a street, it faced two ways. The bank and its doors were in High Street, the principal street of the town; the entrance to the dwelling-house was in Crosse Street, a new, short street, not much frequented, which had been called after Mr. Crosse, who, at the time it was made, lived at the bank. There were only six or eight houses in Crosse Street; detached private dwellings; and the street led to the open country, and to a pathway, not a carriage-way, that would, if you liked to follow it, take you to Ashlydyat.

The house attached to the bank was commodious: its rooms were large and handsome, though few in number. A pillared entrance, gained by steps, led into a small hall. On the right of this hall was the room used as a dining-room, a light and spacious apartment, its large window opening on to a covered terrace, where plants were kept; and that again opened to a sloping lawn, surrounded with shrubs and flowers. This room was hung with fine old pictures, brought from Ashlydyat. Lady Godolphin did not care for pictures; she preferred delicately-papered walls; and very few of the Ashlydyat paintings had been removed to the Folly. On the left of the hall were the rooms belonging to the bank. At the back of the hall, beyond the dining-room, a handsome well-staircase led to the apartments above, one of which was a fine drawing-room. From the upper windows at the back of the house a view of Lady Godolphin's Folly might be obtained, rising high and picturesque; also of the turret of Ashlydyat, grey and grim. Not of Ashlydyat itself its surrounding trees concealed it.

This dining-room, elegant and airy, and fitted up with exquisite taste, was the favourite sitting-room of the Miss Godolphins. The drawing-room above, larger and grander, less comfortable, and looking on to the High Street, was less used by them. In this lower room there sat one evening Thomas Godolphin and his eldest sister. It was about a month subsequent to that day, at the commencement of this history, when you saw the hounds throw off, and a week or ten days since Sir George Godolphin had been found insensible on the floor of his room at Broomhead. The attack had proved to be

nothing but a prolonged fainting-fit; but even that told upon Sir George in his shattered health. It had caused plans to be somewhat changed. Thomas Godolphin's visit to Scotland had been postponed, for Sir George was not strong enough for business consultations, which would have been the chief object of his journey; and George Godolphin had not yet returned to Prior's Ash.

Thomas and Miss Godolphin had been dining alone. Bessy was spending the evening at All Souls' Rectory: she and Mr. Hastings were active workers together in parish matters; and Cecil was dining at Ashlydyat. Mrs. Verrall had called in the afternoon and carried her off. Dessert was on the table, but Thomas had turned from it, and was sitting over the fire. Miss Godolphin sat opposite to him, nearer the table, her fingers busy with her knitting, on which fell the rays of the chandelier. They were discussing plans earnestly and gravely.

"No, Thomas, it would not do," she was saying. "We must go. One of the partners always has resided here at the bank. Let business men be at their place of business."

"But look at the trouble, Janet," remonstrated Thomas Godolphin. "Consider the expense. You may be no sooner out than you may have to come back again."

Janet turned her strangely-deep eyes on her brother. "Do not make too sure of that, Thomas."

"How do you mean, Janet? In my father's precarious state we cannot, unhappily, count upon his life."

"Thomas, I am sure—I seem to see—that he will not be with us long. No; and I am contemplating the time when he shall have left us. It would change many things. Your home would then be Ashlydyat."

Thomas Godolphin smiled. As if any power would keep him from inhabiting Ashlydyat when he should be master. "Yes," he answered. "And George would come here."

"There it is?" said Janet. "Would George live here? I do not feel sure that he would."

"Of course he would, Janet. He would live here with you, as I do now. That is a perfectly understood thing."

"Does he so understand it?"

"He understands it, and approves it."

Janet shook her head. "George likes his liberty; he will not be content to settle down to the ways of a sober household."

"Nay, Janet, you must remember one thing. When George shall come to this house, he comes, so to say, as its master. He will not, of course, interfere with your arrangements; he will fall in with them readily; but neither will he, nor must he, be under your control. To attempt anything of the sort again would not do."

Janet knitted on in silence. She had essayed to keep Master George in hand when they first came to the bank to live there: and the result was that he had chosen a separate home, where he could be entirely *en garçon*.

"Eh me!" sighed Janet. "If young men could but see the folly of their ways—as they see them in after-life!"

"Therefore, Janet, I say that it would be exceedingly inadvisable for you to quit the house," continued Thomas Godolphin, leaving her remark unnoticed. "It might be, that before you were well out of it, you must return to it."

"I see the inconvenience also; the uncertainty," she answered. "But there is no help for it

"Yes there is, Janet, I wish you would let me settle it."

"How would you settle it?"

"By bringing Ethel here. On a visit to you."

Janet laid down her knitting. "What do you mean? That there should be two mistresses in the house, she and I? No, no, Thomas; the daftest old wife in the parish would tell you that does not do."

"Not two mistresses. You would be sole mistress, as you are now:

I and Ethel your guests. Janet, indeed it would be the better plan. By the spring we should see how Sir George went on. If he improved, then the question could be definitively settled: and either you or I would take up our residence elsewhere. If he does not improve, I fear, Janet, that spring will have seen the end."

Something in the words appeared particularly to excite Janet's attention. She gazed at Thomas as if she would search him through and through. "By spring!" she repeated. "When, then, do you contemplate marrying Ethel?"

"I should like her to be mine by Christmas," was the low answer.

"Thomas! And December close upon us!"

"If not, some time in January," he continued, paying no attention to her surprise. "It is so decided."

Miss Godolphin drew a long breath. "With whom is it decided?"

"With Ethel."

"You would marry a wife without a home to bring her to? Had thoughtless George told me that he was going to do such a thing, I could have believed it of him. Not of you, Thomas."

"Janet, the home shall no longer be a barrier to us. I wish you would receive Ethel here as your guest."

"It is not likely that she would come. The first thing a married woman looks for is to have a home of her own."

Thomas smiled. "Not come, Janet? Have you yet to learn how unassuming and meek is the character of Ethel? We have spoken of this plan together, and Ethel's only fear is, lest she should ' be in Miss Godolphin's way.' Failing to carry out this project, Janet—for I see you are, as I thought you would be, prejudiced against it—I shall hire a lodging as near to the bank as may be, and there I shall take Ethel."

"Would it be seemly that the heir of Ashlydyat should go into lodgings on his marriage?" asked Janet, grief and sternness in her tone.

"Things are seemly or unseemly, Janet, according to circumstances. It would be more seemly for the heir of Ashlydyat to take temporary lodgings while waiting for Ashlydyat, than to turn his sisters from their home for a month, or a few months, as the case might be. The pleasantest plan would be for me to bring Ethel here: as your guest. It is what she and I should both like. If you object to this, I shall take her elsewhere. Bessy and Cecil would be delighted with the arrangement: they are fond of Ethel."

"And when children begin to come, Thomas?" cried Miss Godolphin in her old-fashioned, steady, Scotch manner. She had a great deal of her mother about her.

Thomas's lips parted with a quaint smile. "Things will be decided, one way or the other, months before children shall have had time to arrive."

Janet knitted a whole row before she spoke again. "I will take a few hours to reflect upon it, Thomas," she said then.

"Do so," he replied, rising and glancing at the timepiece. "Half-past seven! What time will Cecil expect me? I wish to spend half an hour with Ethel. Shall I go for Cecil before, or afterwards?"

"Go for Cecil at once, Thomas. It will be better for her to be home early."

Thomas Godolphin went to the hall-door and looked out upon the night. He was considering whether he need put on an overcoat. It was a bright moonlight night, warm and genial. So he shut the door, and started. "I wish the cold would come" he exclaimed, half aloud. He was thinking of the fever, which still clung obstinately to Prior's Ash, showing itself fitfully and partially in fresh places about every third or fourth day.

He took the foot-path, down Crosse Street: a lonely way, and at night especially unfrequented. In one part of it, as he ascended near Ashlydyat, the pathway was so narrow that two people could

scarcely walk abreast without touching the ash-trees growing on either side and meeting overhead. A murder had been committed on this spot a few years before: a sad tale of barbarity, offered to a girl by one who professed to be her lover. She lay buried in All Souls' churchyard; and he within the walls of the county prison where he had been executed. Of course the rumour went that her ghost "walked" there, the natural sequence to these dark tales; and, what with that, and what with the loneliness of the place, few could be found in it after dark.

Thomas Godolphin went steadily on, his thoughts running upon the subject of his conversation with Janet. It is probable that but for the difficulty touching a residence, Ethel would have been his in the past autumn. When anything should happen to Sir George, Thomas would be in possession of Ashlydyat three months afterwards; such had been the agreement with Mr. Verrall when he took Ashlydyat. Not in his father's lifetime would Thomas Godolphin (clinging to the fancies and traditions which had descended with the old place) consent to take up his abode as master of Ashlydyat; but no longer than was absolutely necessary would he remain out of it as soon as it was his own. George would then remove to the bank, which would still be his sister's home, as it was now. In the event of George's marrying, the Miss Godolphins would finally leave it: but George Godolphin did not, as far as people saw, give indications that he was likely to marry. In the precarious state of Sir George's health—and it was pretty sure he would soon either get better or worse—these changes might take place any day: therefore it was not desirable that the Miss Godolphins should leave the bank, and that the trouble and expense of setting up and furnishing a house for them should be incurred. Of course they could not go into lodgings. Altogether, if Janet could only be brought to see it, Thomas's plan was the best—that his young bride should be Janet's guest for a short time.

It was through the upper part of this dark path, which was called the Ash-tree Walk, that George Godolphin had taken Maria Hastings, the night they had left Lady Godolphin's dinner-table to visit the Dark Plain. Thomas, in due course, arrived at the end of the walk, and passed through the turnstile. Lady Godolphin's Folly lay on the right, high and white and clear in the moonbeams. Ashlydyat lay to the left, dark and grey, and almost hidden by the trees. Grey as it was, Thomas looked at it fondly: his heart yearned to it: and it was to be the future home of himself and Ethel!

"Holloa! who's this? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Godolphin!"

The speaker was Snow, the surgeon. He had come swiftly upon Thomas Godolphin, turning the corner round the ash-trees from the Dark Plain. That he had been to Ashlydyat was certain, for the road led nowhere else. Thomas did not know that illness was in the house.

"Neither did I," said Mr. Snow in answer to the remark, "until an hour ago, when I was sent for in haste."

A thought crossed Thomas Godolphin. "Not a case of fever, I hope!"

"No. I think that's leaving us. There has been an accident at Ashlydyat to Mrs. Verrall. At least, what might have been an accident, I should rather say," added the surgeon, correcting himself. "The injury is so slight as not to be worth the name of one."

"What has happened?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"She managed to set her sleeve on fire: a white lace or muslin sleeve, falling below the silk sleeve of her gown. In standing near a candle, the flame caught it. But now, look at that young woman's presence of mind! Instead of wasting moments in screams, or running through the house from top to bottom, as most people would have done, she instantly threw herself down upon the rug, and rolled herself in it. That's the sort of woman to go through life."

"Is she much burnt?"

"Pooh! Many a child gets a worse burn a dozen times in its first dozen years. The arm between the elbow and the wrist is slightly scorched. It's nothing. They need not have sent for me. The application of a little cold water will take out all the fire. Your sister Cecilia was ten times more alarmed than Mrs. Verrall."

"I am truly glad it is no worse!" said Thomas Godolphin. "I feared fever might have found its way there."

"That is taking its departure; as I think. And, the sooner it goes, the better. It has been capricious as the smiles of a coquette. How strange

it is, that not a soul, down by those Pollard pigsties, should have had it, except the Bonds!"

"It is equally strange that, in many houses, it should have attacked only one inmate, and spared the rest. What do you think now of Sarah Anne Grame?"

Mr. Snow shook his head, and his voice grew insensibly low. "In my opinion she is sinking fast. I found her worse this afternoon; weaker than she has been at all. Lady Sarah said, 'If she could get her to Ventnor?'—'If she could get her to Hastings?' But the removal would kill her: she'd die on the road. It will be a terrible blow to Lady Sarah, if it does come: and—though it may seem harsh to say it—a retort upon her selfishness. Did you know that they used to make Ethel head nurse, while the fever was upon her?"

"No!" exclaimed Thomas Godolphin.

"They did, then. My lady inadvertently let it out to-day, dear child! If she had caught it, I should never have forgiven her mother, whatever you may have done. Good-night. I have a dozen visits now to pay before bedtime."

"Worse" soliloquized Thomas Godolphin, as he stepped on. "Poor, peevish Sarah Anne! But—I wonder, he hesitated as the thought struck him, "whether, if the worst should come, as Snow seems to anticipate, it would put off Ethel's marriage? What with one delay and another—"

Thomas Godolphin's voice ceased, and his heart stood still. He had turned the corner, to the front of the ash-tree grove, and stretching out before him was the Dark Plain, with its weird-like bushes, so like graves, and—its Shadow, lying cold and still in the white moonlight. Yes! there surely lay the Shadow of Ashlydyat. The grey archway rose behind it; the flat plain extended out before it, and the Shadow was between them, all too distinctly visible.

The first shock over, Thomas Godolphin's pulses coursed on again. He had seen that Shadow before in his lifetime, but he halted to gaze at it again. It was very palpable. The bier, as it looked in the middle, a mourner at the head, a mourner at the foot, each—as a spectator could fancy—with bowed heads. In spite of the superstition touching

this strange Shadow in which Thomas Godolphin had been brought up, he looked round now for some natural explanation of it. He was a man of intellect, a man of the world, a man who played his full share in the practical business of everyday life; and such men are not given to acknowledging superstitious fancies in this age of enlightenment, no matter what bent may have been given to their minds in childhood.

Therefore Thomas Godolphin ranged his eyes round and round in the air, and could see nothing that would solve the mystery. "I wonder whether it be possible that certain states of the atmosphere should give out these shadows?" he soliloquized. "But—if so—why should it invariably appear in that one precise spot; and in no other? Could Snow have seen it, I wonder?"

He walked on towards Ashlydyat, his head always turned, looking at the Shadow. "I am glad Janet does not see it! It would frighten her into a belief that my father's end was near," came his next thought.

Mrs. Verrall, playing the invalid, lay on a sofa, her auburn hair somewhat ruffled, her pretty pink cheeks flushed, her satin slippers peeping out; altogether challenging admiration. The damaged arm, its silk sleeve pinned up, was stretched out on a cushion, a small delicate cambric handkerchief, saturated with water, resting lightly on the burn. A basin of water stood near, with a similar handkerchief lying in it, and Mrs. Verrall's maid was at hand to change the handkerchiefs as might be required. Thomas Godolphin drew a chair near to Mrs. Verrall, and listened to the account of the accident, giving her his full sympathy, for it might have been a bad one.

"You must possess great presence of mind," he observed. "I think your showing it, as you have done in this instance, has won Mr. Snows heart."

Mrs. Verrall laughed. "I believe I do possess presence of mind.

And so does Charlotte. Once we were out with some friends in a barouche, and the horses took fright, ran up a bank, turned the carriage over, and nearly kicked it to pieces. While all those with us were fearfully frightened, Charlotte and I remained calm and cool."

"It is a good thing for you," he observed.

"I suppose it is. Better, at any rate, than to go mad with fear, as some do. Cecil" —turning to her—"has had fright enough to last her for a twelvemonth, she says."

"Were you present, Cecil?" asked her brother

"I was present, but I did not see it," replied Cecil. "It occurred in Mrs. Verrall's bedroom, and I was standing at the dressing-table, with my back to her. The first thing I knew, or saw, was Mrs. Verrall on the floor with the rug rolled round her."

Tea was brought in, and Mrs. Verrall insisted that they should remain for it. Thomas pleaded an engagement, but she would not listen: they could not have the heart, she said, to leave her alone. So Thomas—the very essence of good feeling and politeness—waived his objection and remained. Not the bowing politeness of a petit maître, but the genuine consideration that springs from a noble and unselfish heart.

"I am in ecstasy that Verrall was away," she exclaimed. "He would have magnified it into something formidable, and I should not have been allowed to stir for a month."

"When do you expect him home?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"I never expect him until he comes," replied Mrs. Verrall. "London seems to possess attractions for him. Once up there, he may stay a day, or he may stay fifty. I never know."

Cecil went upstairs to put her things on when tea was over, the maid attending her. Mrs. Verrall turned to see that the door was closed, and then spoke abruptly.

"Mr. Godolphin, can anything be done to prevent the wind whistling as it does in these passages?"

"Does it whistle?" he replied.

"The last few nights it has whistled—oh, I cannot describe it to you! If I were not a good sleeper, it would have kept me awake all night. I wish it could be stopped."

"It cannot be done, I believe, without pulling the house down," he said. "My mother had a great dislike to hear it, and a good deal of expense was incurred in trying to remedy it: but it did little or no good."

"What puzzles me is, that the 'wind should have been whistling within the houses when there's no wind whistling without. The weather has been quite calm. Sometimes when it is actually blowing great guns we cannot hear it at all."

"Something peculiar in the construction of the passages," he carelessly remarked. "You hear the whistling or not, according to the quarter from which the wind may happen to be blowing."

"The servants tell a tale—these old Ashlydyat retainers who remain in the house—that this strangely-sounding wind is connected with the Ashlydyat superstition, and foretells ill to the Godolphins."

Thomas Godolphin smiled. "I am sure you do not give ear to anything so foolish, Mrs. Verrall."

"No, that I do not," she answered. "It would take a great deal to imbue me with faith in the supernatural. Ghosts! Shadows! As if any one with common sense could believe in such impossibilities! They tell another tale about here, do they not? That a shadow of some sort may occasionally be seen in the moonbeams in front of the archway, on the Dark Plain; a shadow cast by no earthly substance. Charlotte once declared she saw it. I only laughed at her!"

His lips parted as he listened, and he lightly echoed the laugh said to have been given by Charlotte. Considering what his eyes had just seen, the laugh must have been a very conscious one.

"When do you expect your brother home?" asked Mrs. Verrall. "He seems to be making a long stay at Broomhead."

"George is not at Broomhead," replied Thomas Godolphin. "He left it three or four days ago. He has joined a party of friends in the Highlands. I do not suppose he will return here much before Christmas."

Cecil appeared. They wished Mrs. Verrall good night, and a speedy cure to her burns; and departed. Thomas took the open roadway this time, which did not bring them near to the ash-trees or the Dark Plain.

Part 1. Chapter 11.

A TELEGRAPHIC DESPATCH.

"Cecil," asked Thomas Godolphin, as they walked along, "how came you to go alone to Ashlydyat, in this unceremonious manner?"

"There was no harm in it," answered Cecil, who possessed a spice of self-will. "Mrs. Verrall said she was lonely, and it would be a charity if I or Bessy would go home with her. Bessy could not: she was engaged at the Rectory. Where was the harm?"

"My dear, had there been 'harm,' I am sure you would not have wished to go. There was none. Only, I do not care that you should become very intimate with the Verralls. A little visiting on either side cannot be avoided: but let it end there."

"Thomas! you are just like Janet!" impulsively spoke Cecil. "She does not like the Verralls."

"Neither do I. I do not like him. I do not like Charlotte Pain—"

"Janet again!" struck in Cecil. "She and you must be constituted precisely alike, for you are sure to take up the same likes and dislikes. She would not willingly let me go to-day; only she could not refuse without downright rudeness."

"I like Mrs. Verrall the best of them, I was going to say," he continued. "Do not become too intimate with them, Cecil."

"But you know nothing against Mr. Verrall?"

"Nothing whatever. Except that I cannot make him out."

"How do you mean—' make him out?'"

"Well, Cecil, it may be difficult to define my meaning. Verrall is so impassive; so utterly silent with regard to himself. Who is he? Where did he come from? Did he drop from the moon? Where has he previously lived? What are his family? Where does his property

lie?—in the funds, or in land, or in securities, or what Most men, even though they do come as strangers into a neighbourhood, supply indications of some of these things, either accidentally or purposely."

"They have lived in London," said Cecil.

"London is a wide term," answered Thomas Godolphin.

"And I'm sure they have plenty of money."

"There's where the chief puzzle is. When people possess so much money as Verrall appears to do, they generally make no secret of whence it is derived. Understand, my dear, I cast no suspicion on him in any way: I only say that we know nothing of him: or of the ladies either—"

"They are very charming ladies," interrupted Cecil again. "Especially Mrs. Verrall."

"Beyond the fact that they are very charming ladies," acquiesced Thomas in a tone that made Cecil think he was laughing at her: "you should let me finish, my dear. But I would prefer that they were rather more open, as to themselves, before they became the too-intimate friends of Miss Cecilia Godolphin."

Cecil dropped the subject. She did not always agree with what she called Thomas's prejudices. "How quaint that old doctor of ours is!" she exclaimed. "When he had looked at Mrs. Verrall's arm, he made a great parade of getting out his spectacles, and putting them on, and looking again. 'What d'ye call it—a burn?' he asked her. 'It is a burn, is it not?'" she answered, looking at him. 'No,' said he, 'it's nothing but a scorch.' It made her laugh so. I think she was pleased to have escaped with so little damage."

"That is just like Snow," said Thomas Godolphin.

Arrived at home, Miss Godolphin was in the same place, knitting still. It was turned half-past nine. Too late for Thomas to pay his visit to Lady Sarah's. "Janet, I fear you have waited tea for us!" said Cecil.

"To be sure, child. I expected you home to tea."

Cecil explained why they did not come, relating the accident to Mrs. Verrall. "Eh! but it's, like the young " said Janet, lifting her hands. "Careless! careless! She might have been burned to death."

"What a loud ring!" exclaimed Cecil, as the hall-bell, pealed with no gentle hand, echoed and re-echoed through the house. "If it is Bessy come home, she thinks she will let us know who's there."

It was not Bessy. A servant entered the room with a telegraphic despatch. "The man is waiting, sir," he said, holding out the paper for signature to his master.

Thomas Godolphin affixed his signature, and took up the despatch. It came from Scotland. Janet laid her hand upon it ere it was open: her face looked ghastly pale. "A moment of preparation!" she said. "Thomas, it may have brought us tidings that we have no longer a father."

"Nay, Janet, do not anticipate evil," he answered, though his memory flew unaccountably to that ugly Shadow, and to what he had deemed would be Janet's conclusions respecting it. "It may not be ill news at all."

He glanced his eye rapidly and privately over it, while Cecil came and stood near him with a stifled sob. Then he held it out to Janet, reading it aloud at the same time.

"Lady Godolphin to Thomas Godolphin, Esquire.

"Come at once to Broomhead. Sir George wishes it. Take the first train."

"He is not dead, at any rate, Janet," said Thomas quietly. "Thank Heaven."

Janet, her extreme fears relieved, took refuge in displeasure. "What does Lady Godolphin mean, by sending so vague a message as that?" she uttered. "Is Sir George worse? Is he ill? Is he in danger? Or has the summons no reference at all to his state of health?"

Thomas had taken it into his hand again, and was studying the words: as we are all apt to do in uncertainty. He could make no more out of them.

"Lady Godolphin should have been more explicit," he resumed.

"Lady Godolphin has no right thus to play upon our fears, our suspense," said Janet. "Thomas, I have a great mind to start this very night for Scotland."

"As you please, of course, Janet. It is a long and fatiguing journey for a winter's night."

"And I object to being a guest at Broomhead, unless driven to it, you might add," rejoined Janet. "But our father may be dying."

"I should think not, Janet. Lady Godolphin would certainly have said so. Margery, too, would have taken care that those tidings should be sent to us."

The suggestion reassured Miss Godolphin. She had not thought of it. Margery, devoted to the interests of Sir George and his children (somewhat in contravention to the interests of my lady), would undoubtedly have apprised them were Sir George in danger. "What shall you do?" inquired Janet of her brother.

"I shall do as the despatch desires me—take the first train. That will be at midnight," he added, as he prepared to pay a visit to Lady Sarah's.

Grame House, as you may remember, was situated at the opposite end of the town to Ashlydyat, past All Souls' Church. As Thomas Godolphin walked briskly along, he saw Mr. Hastings leaning over the Rectory gate, the dark trees shading him from the light of the moon.

"You are going this way late," said the Rector.

"It is late for a visit to Lady Sarah's. But I wish particularly to see them."

"I have now come from thence," returned Mr. Hastings.

"Sarah Anne grows weaker, I hear."

"Ay. I have been praying over her."

Thomas Godolphin felt shocked. "Is she so near death as that?" he asked, in a hushed tone.

"So near death as that!" repeated the clergyman in an accent of reproof. "I did not expect to hear a like remark from Mr. Godolphin. My good friend, is it only when death is near that we are to pray?"

"It is chiefly when death is near that prayers are said over us," replied Thomas Godolphin.

"True—for those who have not known when and how to pray for themselves. Look at that girl: passing away from amongst us, with all her worldly thoughts, her selfish habits, her evil, peevish temper! But that God's ways are not as our ways, we might be tempted to question why such as these are removed; such as Ethel left. The one child as near akin to an angel as it is well possible to be, here; the other— In our blind judgment, we may wonder that she, most ripe for heaven, should not be taken to it, and that other one left, to be pruned and dug around; to have, in short, a chance given her of making herself better."

"Is she so very ill?"

"I think her so; as does Snow. It was what he said that sent me up there. Her frame of mind is not a desirable one; and I have been trying to do my part. I shall be with her again to-morrow."

"Have you any message for your daughter?" asked Thomas Godolphin. "I start in two hours' time for Scotland." And then he explained why: telling of their uncertainty.

"When shall you be coming back again?" inquired Mr. Hastings.

"Within a week. Unless my father's state should forbid it. I may be wishing to take a holiday at Christmas time, or thereabouts, so shall not stay away now. George is absent, too."

"Staying at Broomhead?"

"No; he is not at Broomhead now."

"Will you take charge of Maria? We want her home."

"If you wish it, will. But I should think they would all be returning very shortly. Christmas is intended to be spent here."

"You may depend upon it, Christmas will not see Lady Godolphin at Prior's Ash, unless the fever shall have departed to spend its Christmas in some other place," cried the Rector.

"Well, I shall hear their plans when I get there."

"Bring back Maria with you, Mr. Godolphin. Tell her it is my wish. Unless you find that there's a prospect of her speedy return with Lady Godolphin. In that case, you may leave her."

"Very well," replied Thomas Godolphin.

He continued his way, and Mr. Hastings looked after him in the bright moonlight, till his form disappeared in the shadows cast by the roadside trees.

It was striking ten as Thomas Godolphin opened the iron gates at Lady Sarah Grame's: the heavy clock-bell of All Souls' came sounding upon his ear in the stillness of the night. The house, all except from one window, looked dark: even the hall-lamp was out, and he feared they might all have retired. From that window a dull light shone behind the blind: a stationary light it had been of late, to be seen by any nocturnal wayfarer all night long; for it came from the sick-chamber.

Elizabeth opened the door. "Oh, sir!" she exclaimed in the surprise of seeing him so late, "I think Miss Ethel has gone up to bed."

Lady Sarah came hastening down the stairs as he stepped into the hail: she also was surprised at the late visit.

"I would not have disturbed you, but that I am about to leave for Broomhead," he explained. "A telegraphic despatch has arrived from Lady Godolphin, calling me thither. I should like to see Ethel, if not inconvenient to her. I know not how long I may be away."

"I sent Ethel to bed: her head ached," said Lady Sarah. "It is not many minutes since she went up. Oh, Mr. Godolphin, this has been such a day of grief! heads and hearts alike aching."

Thomas Godolphin entered the drawing-room, and Lady Sarah Grame called Ethel down, and then returned to her sick daughter's room. Ethel came instantly. The fire in the drawing-room was still alight, and Elizabeth had been in to stir it up. Thomas Godolphin stood over it with Ethel, telling her of his coming journey and its cause. The red embers threw a glow upon her face: her brow looked heavy, her eyes swollen.

He saw the signs, and laid his hand fondly upon her head. "What has given you this headache, Ethel?"

The ready tears came into her eyes. "It does ache very much," she answered.

"Has crying caused it?"

"Yes," she replied. "It is of no use to deny it, for you would see it by my swollen eyelids. I have wept to-day until it seems that I can weep no longer, and it has made my eyes ache and my head dull and heavy."

"But, my darling, you should not give way to this grief. It may render you seriously ill."

"Oh, Thomas! how can I help it?" she returned, with emotion, as the tears dropped swiftly over her cheeks. "We begin to see that there is no chance of Sarah Anne's recovery. Mr. Snow told mamma so to-day: and he sent up Mr. Hastings."

"Ethel, will your grieving alter it?"

Ethel wept silently. There was full and entire confidence between her and Thomas Godolphin: she could speak out all her thoughts, her troubles to him, as she could have told them to a mother—if she had had a mother who loved her.

"If she were only a little more prepared to go, the pain would seem less," breathed Ethel. "That is, we might feel more reconciled to losing her. But you know what she is, Thomas. When I have tried to talk a little bit about heaven, or to read a psalm to her, she would not listen: she said it made her dull, it gave her the horrors. How can she, who has never thought of God, be fit to meet Him?"

Ethel's tears were deepening into sobs. Thomas Godolphin involuntarily thought of what Mr. Hastings had just said to him. His hand still rested on Ethel's head.

"You are fit to meet Him?" he exclaimed involuntarily. "Ethel, whence can have arisen the difference between you? You are sisters; reared in the same home."

"I do not know," said Ethel simply. "I have always thought a great deal about heaven; I suppose it is that. A lady, whom we knew as children, used to buy us a good many story-books, and mine were always stories of heaven. It was that which first got me into the habit of thinking of it."

"And why not Sarah Anne?"

"Sarah Anne would not read them. She liked stories of gaiety and excitement; balls, and things like that."

Thomas smiled; the words were so simple and natural. "Had the fiat gone forth for you, instead of for her, Ethel, it would have brought you no dismay?"

"Only that I must leave all my dear ones behind me," she answered, looking up at him, a bright smile shining through her tears. "I should know that God would not take me, unless it were for the best. Oh, Thomas! if we could only save her!"

"Child, you contradict yourself. If what God does must be for the best—and it is—that thought should reconcile you to parting with Sarah Anne."

"Y—es," hesitated Ethel. "Only I fear she has never thought of it herself, or in any way prepared for it."

"Do you know that I have to find fault with you?" resumed Thomas Godolphin, after a pause. "You have not been true to me, Ethel."

She turned her eyes upon him in surprise.

"Did you not promise me—did you not promise Mr. Snow, not to enter your sister's chamber while the fever was upon her? I hear that you were in it often: her head nurse."

A hot colour flushed into Ethel's face. "Forgive me, Thomas," she whispered; "I could not help myself. Sarah Anne—it was on the third morning of her illness, when I was getting up—suddenly began to cry out for me very much, and mamma came to my bedroom and desired me to go to her. I said that Mr. Snow had forbidden me, and that I had promised you. It made mamma angry. She asked if I could be so selfish as to regard a promise before Sarah Anne's life; that she might die if I thwarted her: and she took me by the arm and pulled me in. I would have told you, Thomas, that I had broken my word; I wished to tell you; but mamma forbade me to do so."

Thomas Godolphin stood looking at her. There was nothing to answer: he had known, in his deep and trusting love, that the fault had not lain with Ethel. She mistook his silence, thinking he was vexed.

"You know, Thomas, so long as I am here in mamma's home, her child, it is to her that I owe obedience," she gently pleaded. "As soon-as I shall be your wife, I shall owe it and give it implicitly to you."

"You are right, my darling."

"And it has produced no ill consequences," she resumed. "I did not catch the fever. Had I found myself growing in the least ill, I should have sent for you and told you the truth."

"Ethel?" he impulsively cried—very impulsively for calm Thomas Godolphin; "had you caught the fever, I should never have forgiven those who led you into danger. I could not lose you."

"Hark!" said Ethel. "Mamma is calling."

Lady Sarah had been calling to Mr. Godolphin. Thinking she was not heard, she now came downstairs and entered the room, wringing her hands; her eyes were overflowing, her sharp thin nose was redder than usual. "Oh dear I don't know what we shall do with her!" she uttered. "She is so ill, and it makes her so fretful. Mr. Godolphin, nothing will satisfy her now but she must see you."

"See me!" repeated he.

"She will she says. I told her you were departing for Scotland, and she burst out crying, and said if she were to die she should never see you again. Do you mind going in? You are not afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid," said Thomas Godolphin. "Infection cannot have remained all this time. And if it had, I should not fear it."

Lady Sarah Grame led the way upstairs. Thomas followed her. Ethel stole in afterwards. Sarah Anne lay in bed, her thin face, drawn and white, raised upon the pillow; her hollow eyes were strained forward with a fixed look. Ill as he had been led to suppose her, he was scarcely prepared to see her like this; and it shocked him. A cadaverous face, looking ripe for the tomb.

"Why have you never come to see me?" she asked in her hollow voice, as he approached and leaned over her. "You'd never have come till I died. You only care for Ethel."

"I would have come to see you had I known you wished it," he answered. "But you do not look strong enough to receive visitors."

"They might cure me, if they would," she continued, panting for breath. "I want to go away somewhere, and that Snow won't let me. If it were Ethel, he would take care to cure her."

"He will let you go as soon as you are equal to it, I am sure," said Thomas Godolphin.

"Why should the fever have come to me at all?"—Why couldn't it have gone to Ethel instead? She's strong. She would have got well in no time. It's not fair—"

"My dear child, my dear, dear child, you must not excite yourself," implored Lady Sarah, abruptly interrupting her.

"I shall speak," cried Sarah Anne, with a touch, feeble though it was, of her old peevish vehemence. "Nobody's thought of but Ethel. If you had had your way," looking hard at Mr. Godolphin, "she wouldn't have been allowed to come near me; no, not if I had died."

Her mood changed to tears. Lady Sarah whispered to him to leave the room: it would not do, this excitement. Thomas wondered why he had been brought to it. "I will come and see you again when you are better," he soothingly whispered.

"No you won't," sobbed Sarah Anne. "You are going to Scotland, and I shall be dead when you come back. I don't want to die. Why do they frighten me with their prayers? Good-bye, Thomas Godolphin."

The last words were called after him; when he had taken his leave of her and was quitting the room. Lady Sarah attended him to the threshold: her eyes full, her hands lifted. "You may see that there's no hope of her!" she wailed.

Thomas did not think there was the slightest hope. To his eye—though it was not so practised an eye in sickness as Mr. Snow's, or even as that of the Rector of All Souls'—it appeared that in a very few days, perhaps hours, hope for Sarah Anne Grame would be over for ever.

Ethel waited for him in the hall, and was leading the way back to the drawing-room; but he told her he could not stay longer, and opened

the front door. She ran past him into the garden, putting her hand into his as he came out.

"I wish you were not going away," she sadly said, her spirits, that night very unequal, causing her to see things with a gloomy eye.

"I wish you were going with me!" replied Thomas Godolphin. "Do not weep, Ethel. I shall soon be back again."

"Everything seems to make me weep to-night. You may not be back until—until the worst is over. Oh! if she might but be saved!"

He held her face close to him, gazing down at it in the moonlight. And then he took from it his farewell kiss. "God bless you, my darling, for ever and for ever!"

"May He bless you, Thomas!" she answered, with streaming eyes: and, for the first time in her life, his kiss was returned. Then they parted. He watched Ethel indoors, and went back to Prior's Ash.

Part 1. Chapter 12.

DEAD.

"Thomas, my son, I must go home. I don't want to die away from Ashlydyat!"

A dull pain shot across Thomas Godolphin's heart at the words. Did he think of the old superstitious tradition—that evil was to fall upon the Godolphins when their chief should die, and not at Ashlydyat? At Ashlydyat his father could not die; he had put that out on his power when he let it to strangers: in its neighbourhood, he might.

"The better plan, sir, will be for you to return to the Folly, as you seem to wish it," said Thomas. "You will soon be strong enough to undertake the journey."

The decaying knight was sitting on a sofa in his bedroom. His second fainting-fit had lasted some hours—if that, indeed, was the right name to give to it—and he had recovered, only to be more and more weak. He had grown pretty well after the first attack—when Margery had found him in his chamber on the floor, the day Lady Godolphin had gone to pay her visit to Selina. The next time, he was on the lawn before the house, talking to Charlotte Pain, when he suddenly fell to the ground. He did not recover his consciousness until evening; and nearly the first wish he expressed was a desire to see his son Thomas. "Telegraph for him," he said to Lady Godolphin.

"But you are not seriously ill, Sir George," she had answered.

"No; but I should like him here. Telegraph to him to start by first train."

And Lady Godolphin did so, accordingly, sending the message that angered Miss Godolphin. But, in this case, Lady Godolphin did not deserve so much blame as Janet cast on her: for she did debate the point with herself whether she should say Sir George was ill, or not, believing that these two fainting-fits had proceeded from want of strength only, that they were but the effect of his long previous

illness, and would lead to no bad result, she determined not to speak of it. Hence the imperfect message.

Neither did Thomas Godolphin see much cause for fear when he arrived at Broomhead. Sir George did not look better than when he had left Prior's Ash, but neither did he look much worse. On this, the second day, he had been well enough to converse with Thomas upon business affairs: and, that over, he suddenly broke out with the above wish. Thomas mentioned it when he joined Lady Godolphin afterwards. It did not meet with her approbation.

"You should have opposed it," said she to him in a firm, hard tone.

"But why so, madam?" asked Thomas. "If my father's wish is to return to Prior's Ash, he should return."

"Not while the fever lingers there. Were he to take it—and die—you would never forgive yourself."

Thomas had no fear of the fever on his own score, and did not fear it for his father. He intimated as much. "It is not the fever that will hurt him, Lady Godolphin."

"You have no right to say that. Lady Sarah Grame, a month ago, might have said she did not fear it for Sarah Anne. And now Sarah Anne is dying!"

"Or dead," put in Charlotte Pain, who was leaning listlessly against the window frame devoured with ennui.

"Shall you be afraid to go back to Prior's Ash?" he asked of Maria Hastings.

"Not at all," replied Maria. "I should not mind if I were going to-day, as far as the fever is concerned."

"That is well," he said. "Because I have orders to convey you back with me."

Charlotte Pain lifted her head with a start. The news aroused her. Maria, on the contrary, thought he was speaking in jest.

"No, indeed I am not," said Thomas Godolphin. "Mr. Hastings made a request to me, madam, that I should take charge of his daughter when I returned," continued he to Lady Godolphin. "He wants her at home, he says."

"Mr. Hastings is very polite!" ironically replied my lady. "Maria will go back when I choose to spare her."

"I hope you will allow her to return with me—unless you shall soon be returning yourself," said Thomas Godolphin.

It is not I that shall be returning to Prior's Ash yet," said my lady. The sickly old place must give proof of renewed health first. You will not see either me or Sir George there on this side Christmas."

"Then I think, Lady Godolphin, you must offer no objection to my taking charge of Maria," said Thomas courteously, but firmly, leaving the discussion of Sir George's return to another opportunity. "I passed my word to Mr. Hastings."

Charlotte Pain, all animation now, approached Lady Godolphin. She was thoroughly sick and tired of Broomhead: since George Godolphin's departure, she had been projecting how she could get away from it. Here was a solution to her difficulty.

"Dear Lady Godolphin, you must allow me to depart with Mr. Godolphin—whatever you may do with Maria Hastings," she exclaimed. "I said nothing to you—for I really did not see how I was to get back, knowing you would not permit me to travel so far alone—but Mrs. Verrall is very urgent for my return. And now that she is suffering from this burn, as Mr. Godolphin has brought us news, it is the more incumbent upon me to be at home."

Which was a nice little fib of Miss Charlotte's. Her sister had never once hinted that she wished her home again; but a fib or two more or less was nothing to Charlotte.

"You are tired of Broomhead," said Lady Godolphin.

Charlotte's colour never varied, her eye never drooped, as she protested that she should not tire of Broomhead were she its inmate for a twelvemonth; that it was quite a paradise upon earth. Maria

kept her head bent while Charlotte said it, half afraid lest unscrupulous Charlotte should call upon her to bear testimony to her truth. Only that very morning she had protested to Maria that the ennui of the place was killing her.

"I don't know," said Lady Godolphin shrewdly. "Unless I am wrong, Charlotte, you have been anxious to leave. What was it that Mr. George hinted at—about escorting you young ladies home—and I stopped him ere it was half spoken? Prior's Ash would talk if I sent you home under his convoy."

"Mr. Godolphin is not George," rejoined Charlotte.

"No, he is not," replied my lady significantly.

The subject of departure was settled amicably; both the young ladies were to return to Prior's Ash under the charge of Mr. Godolphin. There are some men, single men though they be, and not men in years, whom society is content to recognize as entirely fit escorts. Thomas Godolphin was one of them. Had my lady despatched the young ladies home under Mr. George's wing, she might never have heard the last of it from Prior's Ash but the most inveterate scandalmonger in it would not have questioned the trustworthiness of his elder brother. My lady was also brought to give her consent to her own departure for it by Christmas, provided Mr. Snow would assure her that the place was "safe."

In a day or two Thomas Godolphin spoke to his father of his marriage arrangements. He had received a letter from Janet, written the morning after his departure, in which she agreed to the proposal that Ethel should be her temporary guest. This removed all barrier to the immediate union.

"Then you marry directly, if Sarah Anne lives?"

"Directly. In January, at the latest."

"God bless you both!" cried the old knight. "She'll be a wife in a thousand, Thomas."

Thomas thought she would. He did not say it.

"It's the best plan; it's the best plan," continued Sir George in a dreamy tone, gazing into the fire. "No use to turn the girls out of their home. It will not be for long; not for long. Thomas"—turning his haggard, but still fine blue eye upon his son—"I wish I had never left Ashlydyat!"

Thomas was silent. None had more bitterly regretted the departure from it than he.

"I wish I could go back to it to die!"

"My dear father, I hope that you will yet live many years to bless us. If you can get through this winter—and I see no reason whatever why you should not, with care—you may regain your strength and be as well again as any of us"

Sir George shook his head. "It will not be, Thomas; I shall not long keep you out of Ashlydyat. Mind!" he added, turning upon Thomas with surprising energy, "I will go back before Christmas to Prior's Ash. The last Christmas that I see shall be spent with my children."

"Yes, indeed, I think you should come back to us," warmly acquiesced Thomas.

"Therefore, if you find, when Christmas is close upon us, that I am not amongst you, that you hear no tidings of my coming amongst you, you come off at once and fetch me. Do you hear, Thomas? I enjoin it upon you now with a father's authority; do not forget it, or disobey it. My lady fears the fever, and would keep me here: but I must be at Prior's Ash."

"I will certainly obey you, my father," replied Thomas Godolphin.

Telegraphic despatches seemed to be the order of the day with Thomas Godolphin. They were all sitting together that evening, Sir George having come downstairs, when a servant called Thomas out of the room. A telegraphic message had arrived for him at the station, and a man had brought it over. A conviction of what it contained flashed over Thomas Godolphin's heart as he opened it—the death of Sarah Anne Grame.

From Lady Sarah it proved to be. Not a much more satisfactory message than had been Lady Godolphin's; for if hers had not been explanatory, this was incoherent.

"The breath has just gone out of my dear child's body. I will write by next post. She died at four o'clock. How shall we all bear it?"

Thomas returned to the room; his mind full. In the midst of his sorrow and regret for Sarah Anne, his compassion for Lady Sarah—and he did feel all that with true sympathy—intruded the thought of his own marriage. It must be postponed now.

"What did Andrew want with you?" asked Sir George, when he entered.

"A telegraphic message had come for me from Prior's Ash."

"A business message?"

"No, sir. It is from Lady Sarah."

By the tone of his voice, by the, falling of his countenance, they could read instinctively what had occurred. But they kept silence, all, — waiting for him to speak further.

"Poor Sarah Anne is gone. She died at four o'clock."

"This will delay your plans, Thomas," observed Sir George, after some minutes had been given to expressions of regret.

"It will, sir."

The knight leaned over to his son, and spoke in a whisper, meant for his ear alone: "I shall not be very long after her. I feel that I shall not. You may yet take Ethel home at once to Ashlydyat."

Very early indeed did they start in the morning, long before daybreak. Prior's Ash they would reach, all things being well, at nine at night. Margery was sent to attend them, a very dragon of a guardian, as particular as Miss Godolphin herself—had a guardian been necessary.

A somewhat weary day; a long one, at any rate; but at last their train steamed into the station at Prior's Ash. It was striking nine. Mr. Hastings was waiting for Maria, and Mrs. Verrall's carriage for Charlotte Pain. A few minutes were spent in collecting the luggage.

"Shall I give you a seat as far as the bank, Mr. Godolphin?" inquired Charlotte, who must pass it on her way to Ashlydyat.

"Thank you, no. I shall just go up for a minute's call upon Lady Sarah Grame."

Mr. Hastings, who had been placing Maria in a fly, heard the words. He turned hastily, caught Thomas Godolphin's hand, and drew him aside.

"Are you aware of what has occurred?"

"Alas, yes!" replied Thomas. "Lady Sarah telegraphed to me last night."

The Rector pressed his hand, and returned to his daughter. Thomas Godolphin struck into a by-path, a short cut from the station, which would take him to Grame House.

Six days ago, exactly, since he had been there before. The house looked precisely as it had looked then, all in darkness, excepting the faint light that burned from Sarah Anne's chamber. It burnt there still. Then it was lighting the living; now—

Thomas Godolphin rang the bell gently.—Does any one like to do otherwise at a house in which death is an inmate? Elizabeth, as usual, opened the door, and burst into tears when she saw who it was. "I said it would bring you back, sir!" she exclaimed.

"Does Lady Sarah bear it pretty well?" he asked, as she showed him into the drawing-room.

"No, sir, not over well," sobbed the girl. "I'll tell my lady that you are here."

He stood over the fire, as he had done the other night: it was low now, as it had been then. Strangely still seemed the house: he could almost have told that one was lying dead in it. He listened, waiting for Ethel's step, hoping she would be the first to come to him.

Elizabeth returned. "My lady says would you be so good as to walk up to her, sir?"

Thomas Godolphin followed her upstairs. She made for the room to which he had been taken the former night—Sarah Anne's chamber. In point of fact, the chamber of Lady Sarah, until it was given up to Sarah Anne for her illness. Elizabeth, with soft and stealthy tread, crossed the corridor to the door, and opened it.

Was she going to show him into the presence of the dead? He thought she must have mistaken Lady Sarah's orders, and he hesitated on the threshold.

"Where is Miss Ethel?" he whispered.

"Who, sir?

"Miss Ethel. Is she well?"

The girl stared, flung the door full open, and with a great cry flew down the staircase.

He looked after her in amazement. Had she gone crazy? Then he turned and walked into the room with a hesitating step.

Lady Sarah was coming forward to meet him. She was convulsed with grief. He took both her hands in his with a soothing gesture, essaying a word of comfort: not of inquiry, as to why she should have brought him to this room. He glanced to the bed, expecting to see the dead upon it. But the bed was empty. And at that moment, his eyes caught something else.

Seated by the fire in an invalid chair, surrounded with pillows, covered with shawls, with a wan, attenuated face, and eyes that seemed to have a glaze over them, was—who?

Sarah Anne? it certainly was Sarah Anne, and in life still. For she feebly held out her hand in welcome, and the tears suddenly gushed from her eyes. "I am getting better, Mr. Godolphin."

Thomas Godolphin—Thomas Godolphin—how shall I write it? For one happy minute he was utterly blind to what it could all mean: his whole mind was a chaos of wild perplexity. And then, as the dreadful truth burst upon him, he staggered against the wall, with a wailing cry of agony.

It was Ethel who had died.

Part 1. Chapter 13.

UNAVAILING REGRETS.

Yes. It was Ethel who had died.

Thomas Godolphin leaned against the wall in his agony. It was one of those moments that can fall only once in a lifetime; in many lives never; when the greatest limit of earthly misery bursts upon the startled spirit, shattering it for all time. Were Thomas Godolphin to live for a hundred years, he never could know another moment like this: the power so to feel would have left him.

It had not left him yet. Nay, it had scarcely come to him in its full realization. At present he was half stunned. Strange as it may seem, the first impression upon his mind, was—that he was so much nearer to the next world, How am I to define this “nearer?” It was not that he was nearer to it by time; or in goodness: nothing of that sort. She had passed within its portals; and the great gulf, which divides time from eternity, seems to be only a span now to Thomas Godolphin: it was as if he, in spirit, had followed her in. From being a place far, far off, vague, indefinite, indistinct, it had been suddenly brought to him, close and palpable; or he to it Had Thomas Godolphin been an atheist, denying a hereafter,—Heaven in its compassion have mercy upon all such —that one moment of suffering would have recalled him to a sense of his mistake. It was as if he looked above with the eye of inspiration and saw the truth; it was as a brief, passing moment of revelation from God. She, with her loving spirit, her gentle heart, her simple trust in God, had been taken from this world to enter upon a better. She was as surely living in it, had entered upon its mysteries, its joys, its rest, as that he was living here; she, he believed, was as surely regarding him now and his great sorrow, as that he was left alone to battle with it. From henceforth Thomas Godolphin possessed a lively, ever-present link with that world; and knew that its gates would, in God’s good time, be opened for him.

These feelings, impressions, facts—you may designate them as you please—took up their place in his mind all in that first instant, and seated themselves there for ever. Not yet very consciously. To his stunned senses, in his weight of bitter grief, nothing could be to him very clear: ideas passed through his brain quickly, confusedly; as the

changing scenes in a phantasmagoria. He looked round as one bewildered. The bed, prepared for occupancy, on which, on entering, he had expected to see the dead, but not her, was between him and the door. Sarah Anne Grame in her invalid chair by the fire, a table at her right hand, covered with adjuncts of the sick-room—a medicine-bottle with its accompanying wine-glass and tablespoon jelly, and other delicacies to tempt a faded appetite—Sarah Anne sat there and gazed at him with her dark hollow eyes, from which the tears rolled slowly over her cadaverous cheeks. Lady Sarah stood before him; sobs choking her voice as she wrung her hands. Ay, both were weeping. But he—it is not in the presence of others that man gives way to grief: neither will tears come to him in the first leaden weight of anguish.

Thomas Godolphin listened mechanically, as one who cannot do otherwise, to the explanations of Lady Sarah. "Why did you not prepare me?—why did you let it come upon me with this startling shock?" was his first remonstrance.

"I did prepare you," sobbed Lady Sarah. "I telegraphed to you last night, as soon as it had happened. I wrote the message with my own hand, and sent it off to the office before I turned my attention to any other thing."

"I received the message. But you did not say—I thought it was,"

—Thomas Godolphin turned his glance on Sarah Anne. He remembered her state, in the midst of his own anguish, and would not alarm her. "You did not mention Ethel's name," he continued to Lady Sarah. "How could I suppose you alluded to her? How could I suppose that she was ill?"

Sarah Anne divined his motive for hesitation. She was uncommonly keen in penetration: sharp, as the world says; and she had noted his words on entering, when he began to soothe Lady Sarah for the loss of a child; she had noticed his startled recoil, when his eyes fell on her. She spoke up with a touch of her old querulousness, the tears arrested, and her eyes glistening.

"You thought it was I who had died! Yes, you did, Mr. Godolphin, and you need not attempt to deny it. You would not have cared, so that it was not Ethel."

Thomas Godolphin had no intention of contradicting her. He turned from Sarah Anne in silence, to look inquiringly and reproachfully at her mother.

"Mr. Godolphin, I could not prepare you better than I did," said Lady Sarah. "When I wrote the letter to you, telling of her illness—"

"What letter?" interrupted Thomas Godolphin. "I received no letter."

"But you must have received it," returned Lady Sarah in her quick, cross manner. Not cross with Thomas Godolphin, but from a rising doubt whether the letter had miscarried. "I wrote it, and I know that it was safely posted. You ought to have had it by last evening's delivery, before you would receive the telegraphic despatch."

"I never had it," said Thomas Godolphin. "When I waited in your drawing-room now, I was listening for Ethel's footsteps to come to me."

Thomas Godolphin knew, later, that the letter had arrived duly and safely at Broomhead, at the time mentioned by Lady Sarah. Sir George Godolphin either did not open the box that night; or, if he opened it, had overlooked the letter for his son. Charlotte Pain's complaint, that the box ought not to be left to the charge of Sir George, had reason in it. On the morning of his son's departure with the young ladies, Sir George had found the letter, and at once despatched it back to Prior's Ash. It was on its road at this same hour when he was talking with Lady Sarah. But the shock had come.

He took a seat by the table, and covered his eyes with his hand as Lady Sarah gave him a detailed account of the illness and death. Not all the account, that she or any one else could give, would take one iota from the dreadful fact staring him in the face. She was gone; gone for ever from this world; he could never again meet the glance of her eye, or hear her voice in response to his own. Ah, my readers, there are griefs that change all our after-life! rending the heart as an earthquake will rend the earth and, all that can be done is, to sit down under them, and ask of Heaven strength to bear them. To bear them as we best may, until time shall in a measure bring healing upon its wings.

On the last night that Thomas Godolphin had seen her, Ethel's brow and eyes were heavy. She had wept much in the day, and supposed the pain in her head to arise from that circumstance; she had given this explanation to Thomas Godolphin. Neither she, nor he, had had a thought that it could come from any other source. More than a month since Sarah Anne was taken with the fever; fears for Ethel had died' out. And yet those dull eyes, that hot head, that heavy weight of pain, were only the symptoms of approaching sickness! A night of tossing and turning, snatches of disturbed sleep, of terrifying dreams, and Ethel awoke to the conviction that the fever was upon her. About the time that she generally rose, she rang her bell for Elizabeth.

"I do not feel well," she said. "As soon as mamma is up, will you ask her to come to me? Do not disturb her before then."

Elizabeth obeyed her orders. But Lady Sarah, tired and wearied out with her attendance upon Sarah Anne, with whom she had been up half the night, did not rise until between nine and ten. Then the maid went to her and delivered the message.

"In bed still! Miss Ethel in bed still!" exclaimed Lady Sarah. She spoke in much anger: for Ethel was wont to be up betimes and in attendance upon Sarah Anne. It was required of her to be so.

Throwing on a dressing-gown, Lady Sarah proceeded to Ethel's room. And there she broke into a storm of reproach and anger; never waiting to ascertain what might be the matter with Ethel, anything or nothing. "Ten o'clock, and that poor child to have lain until now with no one near her but a servant!" she reiterated. "You have no feeling, Ethel."

Ethel drew the clothes from her flushed face, and turned her glistening eyes, dull last night, bright with fever now, upon her mother. "Oh, mamma, I am ill, indeed I am! I can hardly lift my head for the pain. Feel how it is burning! I did not think I ought to get up."

"What is the matter with you?" sharply inquired Lady Sarah.

I cannot quite tell," answered Ethel. "I only know that I feel ill all over. I feel, mamma, as if I could not get up."

"Very well! There's that dear suffering angel lying alone, and you can think of yourself before you think of her! If you choose to remain in bed you must. But you will reproach yourself for your selfishness when she is gone. Another four and twenty hours and she may be no longer with us. Do as you think proper."

Ethel burst into tears, and caught her mother's robe as she was turning away. "Mamma, do not be angry with me! I trust I am not selfish. Mamma"—and her voice sank to a whisper—"I have been thinking that it may be the fever."

The fever! For one moment Lady Sarah paused in consternation, but the next she decided there was no fear of it. She really believed so.

"The fever!" she reproachfully said. "Heaven help you for a selfish and a fanciful child, Ethel! Did I not send you to bed with headache last night, and what is it but the remains of that headache that you feel this morning? I can see what it is; you have been fretting after this departure of Thomas Godolphin! Get up and dress yourself, and come in and attend upon your sister. You know she can't bear to be waited on by any one but you. Get up, I say, Ethel."

Will Lady Sarah Grame remember that little episode until death shall take her? I should, in her place. She suppressed all mention of it to Thomas Godolphin. "The dear child told me she did not feel well, but I only thought she had a headache, and that she would perhaps feel better up," were the words in which she related it to him. What sort of a vulture was gnawing at her heart as she spoke them? It was true that, in her blind selfishness for that one undeserving child, she had lost sight of the fact that illness could come to Ethel; she had not allowed herself to entertain its probability; she, who had accused of selfishness that devoted, generous girl, who was ready at all hours to sacrifice herself to her sister; who would have sacrificed her very life to save Sarah Anne's.

Ethel got up. Got up as she best could: her limbs aching, her head burning. She went into Sarah Anne's room, and did for her what she was able, gently, lovingly, anxiously, as of yore. Ah, child! let those, who are left, be thankful that it was so it is well to be stricken down in the path of duty, working until we can work no more.

She did so. She stayed where she was until the day was half gone; bearing up, it was hard to say how. She could not touch breakfast; she could not take anything. None saw how ill she was. Lady Sarah was wilfully blind; Sarah Anne had eyes and thoughts for herself alone. "What are you shivering for?" Sarah Anne once fretfully asked her. "I feel cold, dear," was Ethel's unselfish answer: not a word said she further of her illness. In the early part of the afternoon, Lady Sarah was away from the room for some time upon domestic affairs; and when she returned to it Mr. Snow was with her. He had been prevented from calling earlier in the day. They found that Sarah Anne had dropped into a doze, and Ethel was stretched on the floor before the fire, moaning. But the moans ceased as they entered.

Mr. Snow, regardless of waking the invalid, strode up to Ethel, and turned her face to the light. "How long has she been like this?" he cried out, his voice shrill with emotion. "Child! child! why did they not send for me?"

Alas! poor Ethel was, even then, growing too ill to reply. Mr. Snow carried her to her room with his own arms, and the servants undressed her and laid her in the bed from which she was never more to rise. The fever attacked her violently: but not more so than it had attacked Sarah Anne; scarcely as badly; and danger, for Ethel, was not imagined. Had Sarah Anne not got over a similar crisis, they would have feared for Ethel: so are we given to judge by collateral circumstances. It was only on the third or fourth day that highly dangerous symptoms declared themselves, and then Lady Sarah wrote to Thomas Godolphin the letter which had not reached him. There was this much of negative consolation to be derived from its miscarriage: that, had it been delivered to him on the instant of its arrival, he could not have been in time to see her.

"You ought to have written to me as soon as she was taken ill," he observed to Lady Sarah.

"I would have done so had I apprehended danger," she repentantly answered. "But I never did apprehend it. Mr. Snow did not do so. I thought how pleasant it would be to get her safe through the danger and the illness, before you should know of it."

"Did she not wish me to be written to?"

The question was put firmly, abruptly, after the manner of one who will not be cheated of his answer. Lady Sarah dared not evade it. How could she equivocate, with her child lying dead in the house.

"It is true. She did wish it. It was on the first day of her illness that she spoke. 'Write, and tell Thomas Godolphin.' She never said it but that once."

"And you did not do so?" he returned, his voice hoarse with pain.

"Do not reproach me! do not reproach me!" cried Lady Sarah, clasping her hands in supplication, while the tears fell in showers from her eyes. "I did it for the best. I never supposed there was danger;

I thought what a pity it was to bring you back, all that long journey: putting you to so much unnecessary trouble and expense."

Trouble and expense, in such a case! She could speak of expense to Thomas Godolphin! But he remembered how she had had to battle both with expense and trouble her whole life long; that for her these must wear a formidable aspect: and he remained silent.

"I wish now I had written," she resumed, in the midst of her choking sobs. "As soon as Mr. Snow said there was danger, I wished it. But" —as if she would seek to excuse herself— "what with the two upon my hands, she upstairs, Sarah Anne here, I had not a moment for proper reflection."

"Did you tell her you had not written?" he asked. "Or did you let her lie waiting for me, hour after hour, day after day, blaming me for my careless neglect?"

"She never blamed any one; you know she did not," wailed Lady Sarah: "and I believe she was too ill to think even of you. She was only sensible at times. Oh, I say, do not reproach me, Mr. Godolphin I would give my own life to bring her back again! I never knew her worth until she was gone. I never loved her as I love her now."

There could be no doubt that Lady Sarah Grame was reproaching herself far more bitterly than any reproach could tell upon her from Thomas Godolphin. An accusing conscience is the worst of all evils.

She sat there, her head bent, swaying herself backwards and forwards on her chair, moaning and crying. It was not a time, as Thomas Godolphin felt, to say a word of her past heartless conduct, in forcing Ethel to breathe the infection of Sarah Anne's sickroom. And, all that he could say, all the reproaches, all the remorse and repentance, would not bring Ethel back to life.

"Would you like to see her?" whispered Lady Sarah, as he rose to leave.

"Yes."

She lighted a candle, and preceded him upstairs. Ethel had died in her own room. At the door, Thomas Godolphin took the candle from Lady Sarah.

"I must go in alone."

He passed on into the chamber, and closed the door. On the bed, laid out in her white night-dress, lay what remained of Ethel Grame. Pale, still, pure, her face was wonderfully like what it had been in life, and a calm smile rested upon it.—But Thomas Godolphin wished to be alone.

Lady Sarah stood outside, leaning against the opposite wall, and weeping silently, the glimmer from the hall-lamp below faintly lighting the corridor. Once she fancied that a sound, as of choking sobs, struck upon her ears, and she caught up a small black shawl that she wore, for grief had chilled her, flung it over her shoulders, and wept the faster.

He came out by-and-by, calm and quiet as he ever was. He did not perceive Lady Sarah standing there in the shade, and went straight down, the wax-light in his hand. Lady Sarah caught him up at the door of Sarah Anne's room, and took the light from him.

"She looks very peaceful, does she not?" was her whisper.

She could not look otherwise."

Be went on down alone, wishing to let himself out. But Elizabeth had heard his steps, and was already at the door. "Good night, Elizabeth," he said, as he passed her.

The girl did not answer. She slipped out into the garden after him. "Oh, sir and didn't you know of it?" she whispered.

"No."

"If anybody was ever gone away to be an angel, sir, it's that sweet young lady," continued Elizabeth, letting her tears and sobs come forth as they would. "She was just one here and she's gone to her own fit place above."

"Ay. It is so."

"You should have been in this house throughout the whole of the illness, to have see the difference between them, sir! Nobody would believe it. Miss Grame, angry and snappish, and not caring who suffered, or who was ill, or who toiled, so that she was served: Miss Ethel, lying like a tender lamb, patient and meek, thankful for all that was done for her. It does seem hard, sir, that we should lose her for ever."

"Not for ever, Elizabeth," he answered.

"And that's true, too! But, sir, the worst is, one can't think of that sort of consolation just when one's troubles are fresh. Good night to you, sir."

"No, no," he murmured to himself; "not for ever."

Part 1. Chapter 14.

GONE ON BEFORE.

Thomas Godolphin walked on, leaving the high-road for a less-frequented path. the one by which he had come. About midway between this and the railway station, a path, branching to the right, would take him into Prior's Ash. He went along, musing. In the depth of his great grief, there was no repining. He was one to trace the finger of God in all things. If Mrs. Godolphin had imbued him with superstitious feelings, she had also implanted within him something better: and a more entire trust in God it was perhaps impossible for any one to feel, than was felt by Thomas Godolphin. It was what he lived under. He could not see why Ethel should have been taken; why this great sorrow should fall upon him but that it must be for the best, he implicitly believed. The best: for God had done it. How he was to live on without her, he knew not. How he could support the lively anguish of the immediate future, he did not care to think about. All his hope in this life gone! all his plans, his projects, uprooted by a single blow! never, any of them, to return. He might still look for the bliss of a hereafter—ay! that remains even for the most heavy laden, thank God!—but his sun of happiness in this world had set for ever.

Thomas Godolphin might have been all the better for a little sun then—not speaking figuratively. I mean the good sun that illumines our daily world; that would be illumining my pen and paper at this moment, but for an envious fog, which obscures everything but itself. The moon was not shining as it had shone the last night he left Lady Sarah's, when he had left his farewell kiss—oh that he could have known it was the last!—on the gentle lips of Ethel. There was no moon yet; the stars were not showing themselves, for a black cloud enveloped the skies like a pall, fitting accompaniment to his blasted hopes; and his path altogether was dark. Little wonder then, that Thomas Godolphin all but fell over some dark object, crouching in his way: he could only save himself by springing back. By dint of peering, he discovered it to be a woman. She was seated on the bare earth; her hands clasped under her knees, which were raised almost level with her chin which rested on them, and was swaying herself backwards and forwards as one does in grief; as Lady Sarah Grame had done not long before.

"Why do you sit here?" cried Thomas Godolphin. "I nearly fell over you."

"Little matter if ye'd fell over me and killed me," was the woman's response, given without raising her head, or making any change in her position. "Twould only have been one less in an awful cold world, as seems made for nothing but trouble. If the one half of us was out of it, there'd be room perhaps for them as was left."

"Is it Mrs. Bond?" asked Thomas Godolphin, as he caught a glimpse of her features.

"Didn't you know me, sir? I know'd you by the voice as soon as you spoke. You have got trouble too, I hear. The world's full of nothing else. Why does it come?"

"Get up," said Thomas Godolphin. "Why do you sit there? Why are you here at all at this hour of the night?"

"It's where I'm going to stop till morning," returned the woman, sullenly. "There shall be no getting up for me."

"What is the matter with you?" he resumed.

"Trouble," she shortly answered. "I've been toiling up to the work'us, asking for a loaf, or a bit o' money: anything they'd give to me, just to keep body and soul together for my children. They turned me back again. They'll give me nothing. I may go into the union with the children if I will, but not a stiver of help'll they afford me out of it. Me, with a corpse in the house, and a bare cubbort."

"A corpse!" involuntarily repeated Thomas Godolphin. "Who is dead!"

"John."

Curtly as the word was spoken, the tone yet betrayed its own pain. This John, the eldest son of the Bonds, had been attacked with the fever at the same time as the father and brother. They had succumbed to it: this one had recovered: or, at least, had appeared to be recovering.

"I thought John was getting better," observed Thomas Godolphin.

"He might ha' got better, if he'd had things to make him better! Wine and meat, and all the rest of it. He hadn't got 'em: and he's dead."

Now a subscription had been entered into for the relief of the poor sufferers from the fever, Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin having been amongst its most liberal contributors; and to Thomas Godolphin's certain knowledge, a full share, and a very good share, had been handed to the Bonds. Quite sufficient to furnish proper nourishment for John Bond for some time to come. He did not say to the woman, "You have had enough: where has it gone to? it has been wasted in riot." That it had been wasted in riot and improvidence, there was no doubt, for it was in the nature of the Bonds so to waste it; but to cast reproach in the hour of affliction was not the religion of everyday life practised by Thomas Godolphin.

"Yes, they turned me back," she resumed, swaying herself nose and knees together, as before. "They wouldn't give me as much as a bit o' bread. I wasn't going home without taking something to my famished children; and I wasn't going to beg like a common tramp. So I just sat myself down here; and I shan't care if I'm found stark and stiff in the morning!"

"Get up, get up," said Thomas Godolphin. "I will give you something for bread for your children to-night."

In the midst of his own sorrow he could feel for her, improvident old sinner though she was, and though he knew her to be so. He coaxed and soothed, and finally prevailed upon her to rise, but she was in a reckless, sullen mood, and it took him a little effort before it was effected. She burst into tears when she thanked him, and turned off in the direction of the Pollard cottages.

The reflection of Mr Snow's bald head was conspicuous on the surgery blind: he was standing between the window and the lamp. Thomas Godolphin observed it as he passed. He turned to the surgery door, which was at the side of the house, opened it, and saw that Mr. Snow was alone.

The surgeon turned his head at the interruption, put down a glass jar which he held, and grasped his visitor's hand in silence.

"Snow! why did you not write for me?"

Mr. Snow brought down his hand on a pair of tiny scales, causing them to jangle and rattle. He had been bottling up his anger against Lady Sarah for some days now, and this was his first explosion.

"Because I understood that she had done so. I was present when that poor child asked her to do it. I found her on the floor in Sarah Anne's chamber. On the floor, if you'll believe me! Lying there, because she could not hold her aching head up. My lady had dragged her out of bed in the morning, ill as she was, and forced her to attend as usual upon Sarah Anne. I got it all out of Elizabeth. 'Mamma,' she said, when I pronounced it to be fever, though she was almost beyond speaking then, 'you will write to Thomas Godolphin.' I never supposed but that my lady did it. Your sister, Miss Godolphin, inquired if you had been written for, and I told her yes."

"Snow," came the next sad words, "could you not have saved her?" The surgeon shook his head and answered in a quiet tone, looking down at the stopper of a phial, which he had taken up and was turning about listlessly in his fingers.

"Neither care nor skill could save her. I gave her the best I had to give. As did Dr. Beale. Godolphin,"—raising his quick dark eyes, flashing then with a peculiar light—"she was ready to go. Let it be your consolation."

Thomas Godolphin made no answer, and there was silence for a time. Mr. Snow resumed. "As to my lady, the best consolation I wish her, is, that she may have her heart wrung with remembrance for years to come! I don't care what people may preach about charity and forgiveness; I do wish it. But she'll be brought to her senses, unless I am mistaken: she has lost her treasure and kept her bane. A year or two more, and that's what Sarah Anne will be."

"She ought to have written for me."

"She ought to do many things that she does not do. She ought to have sent Ethel from the house, as I told her, the instant the disorder appeared in it. Not she. She kept her in her insane selfishness: and now I hope she's satisfied with her work. When alarming symptoms showed themselves in Ethel, on the fourth day of her illness, I think

it was, I said to my lady, 'It is strange what can be keeping Mr. Godolphin!' 'Oh,' said she, 'I did not write to him.' 'Not write!' I answered: and I fear I used an ugly word to my lady's face. 'I'll write at once,' returned she humbly. 'Of course,' cried I, 'when the steed's stolen we shut the stable-door.' It's the way of the world."

Another pause. "I would have given anything to take Ethel from the house at the time; to take her from the town," observed Thomas Godolphin in a low tone. "I said so then. But it could not be."

"I should have done it, in your place," said Mr. Snow. "If my lady had said no, I'd have carried her off in the face of it. Not married, you say? Rubbish! Every one knows she'd have been safe with you. And you would have been married as soon as was convenient. What are forms and ceremonies and carping tongues, in comparison with a girl's life? A life, precious as was Ethel's!"

Thomas Godolphin leaned his forehead in his hand, lost in retrospect. Oh, that he had taken her! that he had set at nought what he had then bowed to, the conveniences of society! She might have been by his side now, in health and life, to bless him! Doubting words interrupted the train of thought.

"And yet I don't know," the surgeon was repeating, in a dreamy manner. "What is to be, will be. We look back, all of us, and say, 'If I had acted thus, if I had done the other, so and so would not have happened; events would have turned out differently.' But who is to be sure of it? Had you taken Ethel out of harm's way—as we might have thought it—there's no telling but she'd have had the fever just the same: her blood might have become infected before she left the house. There's no knowing, Mr. Godolphin."

"True. Good evening, Snow."

He turned suddenly and hastily to the outer door, but the surgeon caught him before he passed its threshold, and touched his arm to detain him. They stood there in the obscurity, their faces shaded in the dark night.

"She left you a parting word, Mr. Godolphin."

"Ah?"

"An hour before she died she was calm and sensible, though fearfully weak. Lady Sarah had gone to her favourite, and I was alone with Ethel. 'Has he not come yet?' she asked me, opening her eyes. 'My dear,' I said, 'he could not come; he was never written for.' For I knew she alluded to you, and was determined to tell her the truth, dying though she was. 'What shall I say to him for you?' I continued. She put up her hand to motion my face nearer hers, for her voice was growing faint. 'Tell him, with my dear love, not to grieve,' she whispered, between her panting breath. 'Tell him that I have gone on before.' I think they were almost the last words she spoke."

Thomas Godolphin leaned against the modest post of the surgery door, and eagerly drank in the words. Then he wrung the doctor's hand, and departed, hurrying along the street as one who shrank from observation: for he did not care, just then, to encounter the gaze of his fellow-men.

Coming with a quick step up the side street, in which the entrance to the surgery was situated, was the Reverend Mr. Hastings. He stopped to accost the surgeon.

"Was that Mr. Godolphin?"

"Ay. This is a blow for him."

Mr. Hastings's voice insensibly shrank to a whisper. "Maria tells me that he did not know of Ethel's death or illness. Until they arrived here to-night, they thought it was Sarah Anne who died. He went up to Lady Sarah's after the train came in, thinking so."

"Lady Sarah's a fool," was the complimentary rejoinder of Mr. Snow.

"She is, in some things," warmly assented the Rector. "The telegraphic message she despatched to Scotland, telling of the death, was so obscurely worded as to cause them to assume that it alluded to Sarah Anne."

"Ah well! she's only heaping burdens on her conscience," rejoined Mr. Snow in a philosophic tone. "She has lost Ethel through want of care (as I firmly believe) in not keeping her out of the way of infection; she prevented their last meeting, through not writing to him; she—"

"He could not have saved her, had he been here," interrupted Mr. Hastings.

"No one said he could. There would have been satisfaction in it for him, though. And for her too, poor child."

Mr. Hasting did not contest the point. He was so very practical a man (in contradistinction to an imaginative one) that he saw little use in "last" interviews, unless they produced actual good. Turning away, he walked home at a brisk pace. Maria was alone when he entered. Mrs. Hastings and Grace were out of the room, talking to some late applicant: a clergyman's house, like a parish apothecary's, is never free long together. Divested of her travelling cloaks and seated before the fire in her quiet merino dress, Maria looked as much at home as if she had never left it. The blaze, flickering on her face, betrayed to the keen glance of the Rector that her eyelashes were wet.

"Grieving after Broomhead already, Maria?" asked he, his tone a stern one.

"Oh, papa, no! I am glad to be at home. I was thinking of poor Ethel."

"She is better off. The time may come, Maria—we none of us know what is before us—when some of you young ones who are left may wish you had died as she has. Many a one, battling for very existence with the world's cares, wails out a vain wish that he had been taken early from the evil to come."

"It must be so dreadful for Thomas Godolphin!" Maria resumed, looking straight into the fire, and speaking as if in commune with herself, more than to her father.

"Thomas Godolphin must find another love."

It was one of those phrases, spoken in satire only, to which the Rector of All Souls' was occasionally given. He saw so much to condemn in the world, things which grated harshly on his advanced mind, that his speech had become imbued with a touch of gall, and he would often give utterance to cynical remarks, uncalled for at the moment.

Maria took up the words literally. She turned to Mr. Hastings; her cheek flushed, her hands clasped; altogether betraying vivid emotion. "Oh, papa! another love! You should not say it of Thomas Godolphin. Love, such as his, is not for a week or year: it is for all time."

The Rector paused a moment in his reply. His penetrating gaze was fixed upon his daughter. "May I inquire whence you have derived your knowledge of 'love,' Miss Maria Hastings?"

Her eyes drooped, her face turned crimson, her manner grew confused. She turned her countenance from that of her father, and stammered forth some lame excuse. "Every one knows, papa, that Thomas Godolphin was fond of Ethel."

"Possibly. But every one does not know that Maria Hastings deems herself qualified to enlarge upon the subject," was the Rector's reply. And Maria shrank into silence.

There came a day, not many days afterwards, when Maria Hastings, her sisters, and two of her brothers, were gathered in sombre silence around the study window of the Rectory. The room was built out at the back of the house, over the kitchen, and its side window commanded a full view of the churchyard of All Souls', and of the church porch. Grace, who constituted herself mistress of the others a great deal more than did Mrs. Hastings herself, allowed the blind to be drawn up about two inches at the bottom of the window; and Maria, Isaac, Harry, and Rose, kneeling down for convenience sake, brought their faces into contact with it, as the mob outside the churchyard gate did there. Human nature is the same everywhere, whether in the carefully-trained children of a Christian gentleman, or in those who know no training but what the streets have given.

The funeral, even now, was inside the church: it had been inside so long that those eager watchers, estimating time by their impatience, began to think it was never coming out again. A sudden movement in the church porch reassured them, and Grace knelt down and made one with the rest.

Slowly—slowly—on it came. The Reverend Mr. Hastings first, in his white robes; the coffin next; Thomas Godolphin last, with a stranger by his side. Nothing more, except some pall-bearers in their white

scarfs, and the necessary attendants. It was a perfectly simple funeral: according well with what the dead had been in her simple life.

The appearance of this stranger took the curious gazers by surprise. Who was he? A spare man, past middle age, with a red nose and an unmistakable wig on his head. Rumours circulating in Prior's Ash had said that Thomas Godolphin would be sole mourner. Lady Sarah Grame's relatives—and she could not boast of many—lived far north of Aberdeen. "Who can he be?" murmured Grace Hastings.

"Why, don't you girls know? That's through your having stuck yourselves in the house all the morning, for fear you should lose the funeral. If you had gone out, you'd have heard who he is." The retort came from Harry Hastings. Let it be a funeral or a wedding, that may be taking place under their very eyes, boys must be boys all the world over. And so they ever will be.

"Who is he, then?" asked Grace.

"He is Ethel's uncle," answered Harry. "He arrived by train this morning. The Earl of Macsomething."

"The Earl of Macsomething!" repeated Grace.

Harry nodded. "Mac begins the name, and I forget the rest. Lady Sarah was his sister."

"Is, you mean," said Grace. "It must be Lord Macdoune."

The church porch was opposite the study window. The grave had been dug in a line between the two, very near to the family vault of the Godolphins and to the entrance gate of the churchyard. On it came, crossing the broad churchyard path which wound round to the road, treading between mounds and graves. The clergyman took his place at the head, the mourners near him, the rest disposing themselves decently around.

"Grace," whispered Isaac, "if we had the window open an inch, we should hear." And Grace was pleased to accord her sanction, and they silently raised it.

"Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay."

The children—indeed they were little more—hushed their breath and listened, and looked at Thomas Godolphin. Thomas Godolphin stood there, his head bowed, his face still, the gentle wind stirring his thin dark hair. It was probably a marvel to himself in after-life, how he had contrived, in that closing hour, to retain his calmness before the world.

"The coffin's lowered at last!" broke out Harry, who had been more curious to watch the movements of the men, than the aspect of Thomas Godolphin.

"Hush, sir!" sharply rebuked Grace. And the minister's voice again stole over the silence.

"Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear sister here departed, we therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth . . . ashes to ashes. . . . dust to dust. . . . in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself."

Every word came home to Thomas Godolphin's senses; every syllable vibrated upon his heartstrings. That sure and certain hope laid hold of his soul, never again to quit it. It diffused its own holy peace and calm into his troubled mind: and never, until that moment, had he fully realized the worth, the truth, of her dying legacy: "Tell him that I have gone on before." A few years—God, now present with him, alone knew how few or how many—and Thomas Godolphin would have joined her in eternal life.

But why had Mr. Hastings come to a temporary pause? Because his eye had fallen upon one, then gliding up from the entrance of the churchyard to take his place amidst the mourners. One who had evidently arrived in a hurry. He wore neither scarf nor hatband, neither cloak nor hood: nothing but a full suit of plain black clothes.

"Look, Maria," whispered Grace.

It was George Godolphin. He fell quietly in below his brother, his hat carried in his hand, his head bowed, his fair curls waving in the breeze. It was all the work of an instant: and the minister resumed:

"I heard a voice front heaven, saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours,"

And so went on the service to the end.

The beadle, with much bustle and a liberal use of his staff, scattered and dispersed the mob from the gates, to clear a passage. Two mourning coaches were in waiting. Thomas Godolphin came forth, leaning on his brother's arm, both of them bare-headed still. They entered one; Lord Macdoune stepped into the other.

"Thomas!" cried George Godolphin, leaning forward and seizing his brother's hand impulsively, as the mourning-coach paced slowly on: "I should have been here in good time, but for a delay in the train." -

"How did you hear of it? I did not know where to write to you," was Thomas's reply, spoken calmly.

"I heard of it at Broomhead. I went back there, and then I came off at once. Thomas, could they not save her?"

A slight negative movement was all Thomas Godolphin's answer.

"How did you find your father, George?"

"Breaking. Breaking fast. Thomas, all his talk is, that he must come home to die."

"To Ashlydyat. I know. How is he to come to it? The Folly is not Ashlydyat. He has desired me to see that he is at Prior's Ash before Christmas, and I shall do so."

George looked surprised. "Desired you to see that he is?"

"If he is not back speedily, I am to go to Broomhead."

"Oh, I see. That your authority, upholding his, may be pitted against my lady's. Take care, Thomas: she may prove stronger than both of you put together."

"I think not," replied Thomas quietly; and he placed his elbow on the window frame, and bent his face upon his hand, as if wishing for silence.

Meanwhile the Reverend Mr. Hastings had passed through the private gate to his own garden; and half a dozen men were shovelling earth upon the coffin, sending it with a rattle upon the bright plate, which told who was mouldering within:

"ETHEL GRAME. Aged twenty years."

Part 1. Chapter 15.

A MIDNIGHT WALK.

Thomas Godolphin sat in his place at the bank, opening the morning letters. It was some little time after the interment of Ethel Grame, and the second week in December was already on the wane. In two days more it was his intention to start for Broomhead: for no tidings arrived of the return of Sir George. The very last of the letters he came upon, was one bearing the Scotch post-mark. A poor little note with a scrawled address: no wonder the sorting-clerk had placed it last of all! It looked singularly obscure, in comparison with those large blue letters and their business hands.

Thomas Godolphin knew the writing. It was Margery's. And we may as well read the contents with him, verbatim:

"MR. THOMAS SIR,

"I imbrace this favurable oportunitaty of adresing you for I considur it my duty to take up my pen and inform you about my master, He's not long for this world, Mr. Thomas I know it by good tokens which I don't write not being an easy writer but they are none the less true, The master's fretting his life away because he is not at home and she is keeping him because she's timorus of the fever. But you saw how it was sir when you were here and its the same story still. There'd have been a fight for it with my lady but if I'd been you Mr. Thomas I'd have took him also when me and the young ladies went with you to Prior's Ash. When I got back here, sir I saw an awful change in him and Mr. George he saw it but my lady didn't. I pen these lines sir to say you had better come off at once and not wait for it to be nearer Christmas, The poor master is always saying Thomas is coming for me, Thomas is coming for me but I'd not answer for it now that he will ever get back alive, Sir it was the worst day's work he ever did to go away at all from Ashlydyat if my lady was dying to live at the new Folly place she might have gone to it but not him, When we do a foolish wrong thing we don't think of the consekences at the time at least not much of em but we think all the more after and fret our hearts out with blame and it have been slowly killing him ever since, I am vexed to disturb you Mr

Thomas with this epistle for I know you must be in enough grief of your own just now,

"Your humble servant,

"MARGERY."

Thomas Godolphin read it over twice, and then crossed to the opposite side of the private room, where sat a gentleman at another desk. A tall, portly man, with a fresh colour, large, keen dark eyes, and hair white as snow. It was Mr. Crosse.

"Anything particular, Thomas?" he asked, as Thomas Godolphin put the letter into his hand.

"Not in business. Read it, will you?"

Mr. Crosse read the letter through. "Is it my advice you wish for?" asked he, when he came to the last word.

"Not exactly," replied Thomas Godolphin. "I have made up my mind, I believe."

"To go immediately?"

"Yes. Within an hour."

"Right. It is what I should have recommended you to do, had you been undecided. When it comes to letter-writing with Margery, the thing is serious, rely upon it."

And within the hour Thomas Godolphin had started.

The railway station nearest to Broomhead, was three miles distant from it, by the road: but there was a shorter Cut across some fields—bearing past the house of that Mr. Sandy Bray, if you are curious to know—which reduced it to less than two. It was one of those rural stations so little frequented that travellers are tempted to ask why they were built at all. Such a thing as a fly, or an omnibus, had never yet been seen at it, at midday: you may therefore judge what chance Thomas Godolphin had of either, getting there, as he did, at

midnight. He was the only passenger to alight, and the train went puffing on. The man, who lived in the one-roomed cottage close by, and was called the station-master, appeared to be the only official to receive him. A man who had been drafted thither from one of the English lines.

"For Broomhead, sir?" he questioned, recognizing the traveller.

"Yes. Do you happen to know how Sir George Godolphin is?"

"He looks rare and poorly, sir. He was past here in his carriage to-day. Huddled up in a corner of it, as if he was cold; or else hadn't the strength to sit up. Her ladyship was inside with him."

"There's no porter about, I suppose?"

"He has been gone this two hours, sir. I'd offer to carry your, luggage myself, but I shall have the up-express by in half an hour. I shut up for the night then."

"I would not trouble you for so trifling a matter, at this hour, were you at liberty," replied Thomas Godolphin.

He took up his portmanteau himself: a thing not much larger than what the French would call a *petit sac-de-nuit*, containing little besides a clean shirt and his shaving-tackle: and started, bending his steps not along the road, but across it to the stile.

"I wouldn't take the field way to-night, sir, if I were you," said the man from the station door. "The road is safest."

"Why is it?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"There's a nasty bit by the field way, a quarter of a mile before you come to Bray's. Anybody, not knowing it well, might take the wrong turning, and go, head first into the dam."

"But I do know it well," said Thomas Godolphin. "And the night is light enough to distinguish the turnings."

The station-master looked up at the skies—figuratively speaking, for he could see nothing but fog. A light, hazy mist; not a dark one; which seemed likely to turn to rain. He said no more, except a “Good night, sir:” and Thomas Godolphin walked on, hesitating for a moment between the two roads, and then turning decisively to that of the fields, as if some hidden impulse impelled him. Perhaps it did so.

It was not a pleasant night, a pleasant time, or a pleasant way; and Thomas Godolphin began to think he should have done well to have telegraphed his intended journey from Prior’s Ash to Broomhead, that they might have sent a conveyance to await him at the Station. Regrets were of no use now, and he trudged along, taking two steps forward, and one backward, for the ground in places was wet and slippery. It was a peculiar night. There was no moon; there were no stars; no skies in fact to be seen at all, as you have heard; and yet the night was light.

What were Thomas Godolphin’s thoughts bent upon? Need you ask? For some time to come, days and weeks and months, they must run chiefly upon her who had left him. He remembered his last arrival at Broomhead: he remembered his thoughts as he had walked from the station as he was doing now; though then it had been by daylight. His musings had been of Ethel, and his coming marriage; of that farewell kiss which she had pressed upon his lips. Now—now he must only think of her as one of Heaven’s angels.

He lifted his hat to wipe his brow, and then changed his load to the other hand. He was coming to the dam now. He could hear its waters. Go carefully, Thomas Godolphin! A few steps down, that dark turning, and you might never be heard of more. But he knew his way, and the night was light, and he bore on his course, and the dangerous turn was passed.

A little way farther on, and he could discern the outline of Bray’s cottage in the distance. A light burnt in one of the windows, and he wondered who was ill. Probably Margery’s sister. It diverted his own sad reflections. Next he became absorbed in thoughts of his father. How should he find him? Ideas we all know assume the colouring of surrounding associations, and Thomas Godolphin, in that solitary midnight hour, grew to take a more sombre view of the news contained in Margery’s letter than he had hitherto done. It is wonderful how circumstances affect us! In the broad light of day,

walking, for instance, as he had done previously to Broomhead apprehensions would not have come over him. Now he pictured his father (by no will of his own: the scenes rose up unbidden) as lying ill; perhaps dying. Perhaps even then a telegraphic message to him might be on its road to Prior's Ash! Perhaps— A cry right over his head! And Thomas Godolphin positively started. It proceeded from some night-bird that had dived down upon him, and now flew onwards, flapping its wings. Superstitious Margery would have called it an omen.

Thomas Godolphin followed it with his eyes, speculating upon what bird it could be. It looked like a sea-gull; had screamed like one; but the sea was far off and, if it was one, it must have come a long distance.

Back it came again, and dived down as before. Thomas Godolphin did not like it, and he wished the portmanteau in his hand had been a gun. "I wonder what good these restless night-birds do," he ejaculated, "except to disturb from sleep any worn-out mortal who may be within hearing?"

Scenes of the recent past rose up before him: the sombre scenes in which he had been an actor. The ominous Shadow of Ashlydyat, striking on his sight as he turned the ash-trees, the night of his previous summons to Broomhead: the dead face of Ethel lying on her bed; the reminiscence of the funeral scene; of his walking away from it with the dull sound of the earth falling on her coffin smiting his ears! None of them pleasant things to recall at that particular hour. Why should they have come to him?

"What business had they there at such a time?"

Drive them away he could not. But neither did he try to do so. They served to make doubly sad, doubly ominous, his new fears for his father. He knew how precarious was Sir George's life. What if he were then dying! Nay, what if it were the very moment of his departure?—if he were dead? having called upon his children; upon him, Thomas, in vain?

That odious bird once more! It flew over his head with a shriller cry than the last. Thomas Godolphin was at that moment within a few paces of a stile which lay in his path. He turned his head round to

look after the bird, without slackening his pace, putting out his hand before him to feel for the stile. The hand came into contact with it, and Thomas let it rest momentarily. His head was turned, still watching the bird, which was then flying round and round, making fierce circlets in the air.

But he could not stop there all night, staring at the bird, and he turned sharply round to cross the stile. Placing one foot on its lower rail, he—

What made Thomas Godolphin start as if he had been shot?

Who and what was that standing on the other side of the stile fixedly gazing at him? A tall, shadowy, upright form, bearing the unmistakable features of Sir George Godolphin.

Will you—strong, practical, unimaginative men of the world—forgive Thomas Godolphin if in that one brief moment the wild superstitions, instilled into his mind in childhood, were allowed their play? Forgive him, or not, it was the fact. In imagination, only the instant before, he had seen his father lying upon his bed, the soul parting from the body: and Thomas Godolphin as much believed what he now saw before him was his father's spirit, as that he, himself, was in existence. The spirit, appearing to him at the moment of its departure. His flesh turned cold, and dew gathered on his brow.

"My son, can it be you?"

Thomas Godolphin came out of his folly, and grasped his father. That it was real flesh and blood which yielded to his arms, he knew now: but perhaps the surfrise that it should be so, was even greater than the other emotion. Sir George Godolphin there! at that midnight hour! nearly a mile from home! and bareheaded! Was it really Sir George? Thomas Godolphin rubbed his eyes, and thought he, himself, must have taken leave of his senses.

"My father! my dear father! what are you doing here?"

"I thought I'd go to the station, Thomas, and see about a special train. I must go back to Ashlydyat to die."

Thomas climbed over the stile. The tone, the manner, the words, altogether had betrayed to him an unhappy fact—that his father's mind was not in a state of perfect sanity. He trembled for his health, too. It was a cold raw night, and here was Sir George in evening dress, without so much as an overcoat thrown on! He, who had only been out since the last fainting-fit in a close carriage: and then well wrapped up.

"Where is your hat, father?"

The old knight lifted his hand to his head, as if he had not known that his hat was not there. "I must have come out without it, Thomas," he said. "What was that noise over there?" he continued, pointing above the stile to the way Thomas had come, his frame shivering with cold as he spoke.

"I think it was a sea-gull. Or some screaming night-bird."

"I could not get over the stile, Thomas. The walk seemed to have taken the strength out of me. How did you come here? I thought you were at Prior's Ash."

Thomas Godolphin was busy. He had taken off his great coat, and was putting it upon his father, buttoning it up carefully. A smaller man than Sir George, it did not fit well but Sir George had shrunk. The hat fitted better.

"But you have no hat yourself!" said Sir George, surveying his son's head, when he had submitted in patient silence to the dressing.

"I don't want one," replied Thomas. "The night air will not hurt me." Nevertheless, all the way to Broomhead, he was looking on either side, if perchance he might come upon Sir George's hat, lying in the road.

Thomas drew his father close, to support him on his arm, and they commenced their walk to the house. Not until then did Thomas know how very weak his father was. Stooping, shivering, tripping, with every other step, it appeared impossible that he could walk back again: the wonder was, how he had walked there.

The Shadow of Ashlydyat, Volume I

Thomas Godolphin halted in dismay. How was he to get his father home? Carry him, he could not: it was of course beyond his strength. The light in Bray's window suggested a thought to him.

"Father, I think you had better go to Bray's and stay there, while I see about your hand-chair. You are not able to walk."

"I won't go to Bray's," returned the knight, with a touch of vehemence. "I don't like Bray, and I will not put my foot inside his threshold. Besides, it's late, and my lady will miss us."

He pressed on somewhat better towards home, and Thomas Godolphin saw nothing else that could be done, except to press on with him, and give him all the help in his power. "My dear father, you should have waited until the morning," he said, "and have gone out then."

"But I wanted to see about a train, Thomas," remonstrated the knight. "And I can't do it in the day. She will not let me. When we drive past the railway station, she won't get out, and won't let me do so. Thomas, I want to go back to Ashlydyat."

"I have come to take you back, my dear father."

"Ay, ay. And mind you are firm when she says I must not go because of the fever. The fever will not hurt me, Thomas. I can't be firm. I have grown feeble, and people take my will from me. You are my first-born son, Thomas."

"Yes."

"Then you must be firm for me, I say."

"I will be, father."

"This is a rough road, Thomas."

"No, it is smooth; and I am glad that it is so. But you are tired." The old knight bent his head, as if choosing his steps. Presently he lifted his head:

"Thomas, when do they leave Ashlydyat?"

"Who, sir? The Verralls? They have not had notice yet."

Sir George stopped. He drew up his head to its full height, and turned to his son. "Not had notice? When, then, do I go back? I won't go to Lady Godolphin's Folly. I must go to Ashlydyat."

"Yes, sir," said Thomas soothingly. "I will see about it."

The knight, satisfied, resumed his walk. "Of course you will see about it. You are my son and heir, Thomas. I depend upon you."

They pursued their way for some little time in silence, and then Sir George spoke again, his tone hushed. "Thomas, I have put on mourning for her. I mourn her as much as you do. And you did not get there in time to see her alive

"Not in time. No," replied Thomas, looking hard into the mist overhead.

"I'd have come to the funeral, Thomas; if she had let me. But she was afraid of the fever. George got there in time for it?"

"Barely."

"When he came back to Broomhead, and heard of it, he was so cut up, poor fellow. Cut up for your sake, Thomas. He said he should be in time to follow her to the grave if he started at once, and he went off then and there. Thomas" —dropping his voice still lower— "whom shall you take to Ashlydyat now?"

"My sisters."

"Nay. But as your wife? You will be replacing Ethel sometime."

"I shall never marry now, father."

At length Broomhead was reached. Thomas held open the gate of the shrubbery to his father, and guided him through it.

"Shall we have two engines, Thomas?"

"Two engines, sir! What for?"

"They'd take us quicker, you know. This is not the station!" broke forth Sir George in a sharp tone of complaint, as they emerged beyond the shrubbery, and the house stood facing them. "Oh, Thomas! you said you were taking me to Ashlydyat! I cannot die away from it!"

Thomas Godolphin stood almost confounded. His father's discourse, greater part of it, at any rate, had been so rational that he had to hope he was mistaken as to his weakness of mind. "My dear father, be at rest," he said: "we will start if you like with to-morrow's dawn. But to go now to the station would not forward us; it is by this time closed for the night."

They found the house in a state of commotion. Sir George had been missed, and servants were out searching for him. Lady Godolphin gazed at Thomas with all the eyes she possessed, thunderstruck at his appearance. "What miracle brought you here?" she exclaimed, wonderingly.

"No miracle, Lady Godolphin. I am thankful that I happened to come. What might have become of Sir George without me, I know not. I expect he would have remained at the stile where I found him until morning; and might have caught his death there."

"He will catch that speedily enough if he is to wander out of the house at midnight in this mad manner," peevishly rejoined my lady.

Part 1. Chapter 16.

THE LAST JOURNEY.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Godolphin. That is not the question."

"Not the question!" reiterated Lady Godolphin. "I say that it is the question. The question is, whether Sir George is better and safer here than he would be at Prior's Ash. And of course he is so."

"I think not," replied Thomas Godolphin quietly. "He would be equally well at Prior's Ash: equally safe, as I believe and trust. And the anxiety to be there, which has taken hold of his mind, has grown too strong to be repressed. To detain him here, against his wish, would make him ill, Lady Godolphin. Not returning home."

"Prior's Ash is an unhealthy place just now."

"Its unhealthiness has passed away. The last to be attacked was—was Ethel. And you are aware that time, since then, may be counted by weeks."

"Sir George is partially childish," pursued Lady Godolphin. "You may see for yourself that he is so. It would be most unreasonable, it would be ridiculous to take notice of his whims. Look at his starting out of the house to-night, with nothing on, and roaming a mile or two away in the dark! Is that a proof of sanity?"

"It is a proof how fixedly his mind is bent upon returning home," replied Thomas Godolphin. "He was endeavouring, as I have already informed you, Lady Godolphin, to make his way to the station."

"I shall have him watched in future," said she.

"Lady Godolphin," he resumed, speaking in the calmly quiet tone which characterized him, unmistakably firm now, in spite of its courteousness: "I am here by the desire of my father to accompany him back to Prior's Ash. I may almost say, to convey him back: for I fear he can no longer boast much power of his own, in any way. The

last words I said to him, before entering, were, that he should start, if it pleased him, with to-morrow's dawn. I must keep my promise."

"Do you defy me, Thomas Godolphin?"

"I have no wish to do so. I have no wish to abate a particle of the respect and consideration due to you as my father's wife. At the same time, my duty to him is paramount: I hold it more sacred, Lady Godolphin, than any earthly thing. He has charged me, by my duty, to take him back to Ashlydyat—to Prior's Ash: and I shall do so."

"You would take him back, I suppose, if Prior's Ash were full of snakes and scorpions?" returned my lady, somewhat losing her temper.

"It is full of neither. Nothing is there, so far as I am aware, that can harm Sir George. Can you urge a single good reason why he should not return to it, Lady Godolphin!"

The delicate bloom on my lady's cheeks was surely heightened—or did Thomas Godolphin fancy it? "But, what if I say he shall not return?" she asked, her voice slightly raised.

"I think you will not say it, Lady Godolphin," he replied. "It is Sir George's wish to go to Prior's Ash, and it is my province to see that wish carried out—as he has requested me. Much as I desire to respect your feelings and any plans you may have formed, they cannot weigh with me in this case. There is no necessity whatever for your returning home, Lady Godolphin, unless you choose to do so: but Sir George will leave for it to-morrow."

"And you boast that you do not defy me!" cried Lady Godolphin, with a short laugh. "I would use force to keep him in this house, rather than he should go out of it against my will."

"Force?" repeated Thomas Godolphin, looking at her for an explanation. "What sort of force?"

"Physical force," she answered, assuming a degree of fair suavity.

"I would command the servants to bar his exit."

A faint smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's lips. "Do not attempt that, Lady Godolphin," he replied in the respectful manner of one who tenders earnest advice. "I should be sorry indeed to publicly oppose my authority to yours. You know the servants have, most of them, grown old in our service and that may plead their excuse: but there is not one of them who would not be obedient to the lifting of my finger, in the cause of their master."

Lady Godolphin was foiled. Lady Godolphin had long been aware that she should be foiled, if it ever came to an encounter—strength against strength—between herself and Thomas Godolphins. Easy George she could manage, the Miss Godolphins she could put down, Sir George was, now, as a reed in her hands. But Thomas?—he was different. None of them had been so uniformly respectful and courteous to her as Thomas. And yet she had known that he, of all the rest, would not bend to her authority, were any cause to arise why he should not do so.

She sat biting—as far as she dared—her rose-tinted lips; she lifted one hand and toyed with her perfumed ringlets; she opened a fan which lay at her side, and gently fanned herself; she glanced at the still countenance of Thomas Godolphin: and she knew that she must give up the game. To give it up with a good grace was essential to her future ruling; and she was now making up her mind to do this. It would never do, either, for her to stand in the hall on the morrow, call the servants around her, and say, "It is my pleasure that Sir George does not leave this place for Prior's Ash. Keep him in; hold him in; lock the door; use any necessary means," while Thomas Godolphin was at hand, to lift—as he had phrased it—his finger, and say "it is my pleasure that my father does go to Prior's Ash. Stand back while he passes." Lady Godolphin was no simpleton, and she could hazard a shrewd guess as to which of the two would be obeyed. So she sat, bringing her mind to make a virtue of necessity, and throw up the plea. In point of fact, she had no cause of objection to Sir George returning to Prior's Ash, except that she did not care to return herself. For two reasons: one, that she liked Broomhead best: the other, that she could not yet subdue her fears of the fever. She bent her head, as if examining the chaste devices on her fan, and spoke indifferently.

"You must be aware that my wish to keep Sir George here arises solely from the state of Prior's Ash. It always has been our custom to spend Christmas there, amongst you all, and I should have had no

Other thought for this Christmas, but for the illness which arose. Will you-guarantee that it is safe for him?"

"Nay, Lady Godolphin. To 'guarantee' an assurance of the sort would be impossible at the best of times. I believe that any fears you May entertain now of the fever will prove only a bugbear."

"The fever has been more than a bugbear to you," she exclaimed, acidity in her tone.

"Yes," he sadly answered.

He drew his chair from the table, where he had been taking some refreshment after his journey, and at that moment the hall clock struck two.

"I am keeping you up very late, Lady Godolphin."

"It is a pleasant change," she answered. "The life here, with Sir George in his delicate state, is so excessively monotonous, that a few nights of sitting up and days of bed, might prove an agreeable variety. Did I understand you rightly—that you intend to start in the morning?"

"If Sir George shall then wish to do so as anxiously as he appeared to wish it to-night. Otherwise, I shall not object to delay it until the following one. I cannot remain longer: business demands my presence at home. And," he added, lowering his voice, "I fear that speed is necessary for my father's sake. If he does not go pretty soon, he may not be able to go at all. It is more than likely that we shall start to-morrow."

"You cannot expect me to be ready in that space of time."

"Certainly not. Just as you please, Lady Godolphin."

Thomas Godolphin was shown to his room. Margery waylaid him in the corridor and entered it with him. "Did you get my epistle, Mr. Thomas?"

"It was that which brought me here now, Margery. Otherwise, I should not have come until the end of the week."

"Then you would have come too late, sir. Yes, Mr. Thomas, I mean what I say," added the woman, dropping her voice to solemnity. "By dreams and signs and tokens, which I have had—"

"Stay, Margery. You know that I am never very tolerant of your dreams and signs. Let them rest."

"It's true you are not," answered Margery, without the least appearance of discomfiture; "and many's the argument I would have liked to hold with you over it. But you'd never let me. When you were a young man, you'd laugh and joke it down—just as Mr. George might now, were I so foolish as to waste words upon him—and since you grew older and steadier you have just put me off as you are doing at this moment. Mr. Thomas, gifts are different in different people. They are not sent upon all alike: and the Scripture says so. One will see what another can't. One will play beautiful music, while another can't tell one tune from another. One man has a head for steam-engines and telegraphs, and will put 'em together as if he had a workshop inside him; and another, his own cousin maybe, can hardly tell an engine when he sees it, and couldn't work one out if he lived to be a hundred years old. And so with other things."

"Well?" responded Thomas Godolphin: for Margery paused, as if waiting for an answer.

"And do you suppose, Mr. Thomas, that it's not the same with signs and warnings? It is not given to all to see or understand them. It is not given, as I take it, for many to see or understand them. But it is given to a few. And those few can no more be talked out of knowing that it's truth, than they can be talked out of their own life, or of the skies above 'em. And, Mr. Thomas, it's not only that those who have not the gift can't see or believe for themselves, but they can't be brought to believe that others may do so: and so they laugh at and ridicule it. Many a time, sir, you have laughed at me."

"You see so many, you know, Margery," said Thomas Godolphin, with a slight smile.

Margery looked at him. "Sometimes I have thought, sir, that you are not quite as unbelieving as you seem. But I know it does not do for a gentleman, high and educated and looked up to in his town, to say he puts faith in such. So I'll not trouble you, Mr. Thomas, with the tokens I have had. I'll not tell you that only last night that ever was, I heard the footsteps of —"

"But you are telling me, Margery."

"That's just how you take me up, Mr. Thomas! Well, sir, I say I'll not bring forward these things, but I'll speak of what you may think a surer sign—and that's Sir George's state of health."

"Ay! I can follow you there."

He let her talk on. And she did so, until he was obliged to give her a gentle hint that he should be glad to be alone and get to bed.

The house was awakened before it was yet dawn. Sir George had rung for his servant, had rung for Margery, had rung for the coachman to say the carriage was wanted—in short, had rung for so many, that the whole household was aroused. My lady appeared, in fur slippers and a warm dressing-gown, to know what the commotion could mean. His son Thomas was there, the knight answered. He was sure he had not dreamt it, but that Thomas had come the previous night; he met him at the stile; and Thomas had promised that they should go to Ashlydyat in the early morning.

It appeared he was sane enough to remember that. My lady retired, grumbling; and Margery went and called Thomas.

When Thomas reached the room, Sir George was almost in the last gage of dressing. His own trembling, eager fingers had done as much towards it as his servant. He lifted his face with its ashy hue and its strange yearning. "Thomas, my son, I must hasten back to Ashlydyat. You said I should go there to die."

"Do you wish to start immediately, father?"

"You said I should do so!" he wailed in a tone imploringly earnest. "You said I should start with this morning's dawn."

"Yes, yes," acquiesced Thomas. And he forthwith busied himself to advance the preparations.

The best hour that they could leave the station was a little before nine. No train, except one much earlier, stopped at it before. This gave time to get off comfortably: though Sir George, in his impatience, could with difficulty be induced to sit down to breakfast. My lady came in when they were at the table.

"This is really the most extraordinary proceeding!" she exclaimed, speaking chiefly to Thomas Godolphin. "Were such a thing related to me as taking place in another house I should decline to give credence to it. Are the hours of the day so few that you must choose the gloom of a winter's morning for commencing a journey?"

Thomas glanced at Sir George, as if to draw her attention to him. "My father's anxiety will not allow him to wait, Lady Godolphin. I think it well that we should catch the first train."

"I wash my hands of the journey altogether," said Lady Godolphin. "If Sir George does not reach the other end of it alive, you will have the goodness to remember that I am not to blame. Far better that he were safely kept in his room wrapped up in his dressing-gown in front of a good fire."

"In that case, my lady, I would not answer for it that he reached the end of the day alive," interposed Margery, who was in and out of the room busier than any of them. "Whether Sir George stays, or whether he goes, he'll not last many days," she added in a lower tone, so that it might not reach her master's ear.

"If I must have gone, I would have started at a Christian hour, Sir George," resumed his wife. "Getting us all out of bed as if we were so many milkmaids?"

Sir George looked round, timidity in his voice and manner. Did he fear that she would detain him even now? "You can come on afterwards, you know, Lady Godolphin; we need not hurry you. Oh, I must, I must be at Ashlydyat!"

Thomas Godolphin came to the rescue. "We shall be in the carnage in five minutes, my dear father, if you will only take your breakfast."

And in a little more than five minutes they were seated in it, on their way to the station, Sir George's own man and Margery attending them. Margery would have deemed it just as possible to cut herself in twain, as-to be separated from her master in his present state.

They did not get him that night to Prior's Ash. Thomas feared the long journey for him without a break, so they halted for the night about midway. Singularly to state, Sir George did not utter an impatient word at the delay: from the moment of leaving Broomhead he had become perfectly calm. Whether the fact of his being indisputably on the road had soothed his mind to tranquillity, or whether the strangely eager desire to be home had now left it, certain it was, that he had never mentioned Ashlydyat throughout the day. Of one thing there could be no doubt—that he was fast sinking. Sinking both in mind and body. Margery grew terrified. "Pray Heaven we may get him home!" she aspired. "Mr. Thomas, as sure as that we are here, he would have been dead before this, had he stopped at Broomhead!"

In the twilight of the second evening, Sir George was at length once more at Prior's Ash. Thomas had telegraphed their arrival, and Janet was at the station with the carriage. But, with the first few words, Janet perceived that he was perfectly childish. Not only childish, but alarmingly changed. Janet grew pale as she turned to Margery.

"Since when?" she murmured.

"Since many days, off and on; but worse since we left Broomhead yesterday morning. He has been sinking hour by hour. Miss Janet, it's death."

They got him to the Folly. And, in half an hour, the whole of his family were gathered round his death-bed. His partner, Mr. Crosse; the surgeon; and the Rector of All Souls' were also there.

He was rambling for the most part in a disconnected manner: but he recognized them all individually, and occasionally gave utterance to rational remarks, as he might have done had he been in full possession of his senses. He fancied himself at Ashlydyat.

"I could not have died away from it, you know, Crosse," he suddenly cried to that gentleman. "Thomas was for bringing me

back to the Folly, but I told him I must go to Ashlydyat. If I did let it to strangers, they could not keep me out of it, when I wanted to go there to die. A Godolphin must not die away from Ashlydyat. Where's Cecil?" he added, after a pause.

Poor Cecil, the tears streaming down her cheeks, was close to him; in view then. "I am here, papa."

The knight laid his hand upon her arm — or rather, essayed to do so, but it fell again. His thoughts seemed to pass to another subject.

"Crosse, I have been telling Thomas that I should not allow more than three per cent. on those deposits. Have you seen Mainwaring lately?"

Mr. Snow stepped forward and administered something in a wineglass. There appeared to be a difficulty in swallowing, and only part of it was taken. "He grows more restless," said the surgeon in an undertone.

Sir George's eyes, as he was slightly raised to take the medicine, had fallen upon some object at the other end of the room, and continued to be strained on it. "Who has changed the position of the cabinet?" he exclaimed, in a stronger tone than he had yet spoken.

It caused them all to turn and look at the spot. A fine old ebony cabinet, inlaid with silver stood opposite the bed: had stood there ever since they removed to Lady Godolphin's Folly; transplanted thither from Ashlydyat. In the latter house, it had stood on the right of Sir George's bed: and his memory had evidently gone back to that. There could not be a better proof that he was fancying himself at Ashlydyat, lying in his own chamber.

"Janet I why have you placed the cabinet there?"

Janet Godolphin bent her head soothingly over him. "My dear father, it shall be moved, if you wish it."

The knight looked at her, inquiringly for a moment, perhaps not recognizing her. Then he feebly essayed to look beyond her, as if her head-interposed between his own view and something behind.

"Hush, my -dear, I am speaking to your mother. I want to know why she changed the place of the cabinet."

"We thought you'd like it there, Sir George; that you could see it better there," interposed Margery, who knew better than most of them how to deal with the sick. "I'll have it put back before to-morrow morning."

This satisfied him, and he lay still for a few minutes. They thought he would sleep. Presently his eyes opened again, and they rested on George. -

"George, where's Charlotte?"

"Who, sir?" demanded George, somewhat taken aback at the question. "Do you mean Charlotte Pain? She is at—she is not here."

"Are you married yet?"

"Oh no," said George hastily, while several pairs of wondering eyes were directed towards him, and those of the Reverend Mr. Hastings were of the number. "Time enough for that, father."

"George'" next came the words, in a hollow whisper this time, "Don't let her die, as Ethel did."

"Not if I can help it," replied George, speaking without any serious meaning, except that of humouring his father.

"And don't let Verrall go off the bargain with the money. He is keen that way; but he has no right to touch Charlotte's. If he does—Bessy, is Jekyl dead?"

"Oh no, papa," said Bessy, suppressing her tears as she caressed her father's hand it was in stooping to do this, that the knight had observed her. "Jekyl is well and hearty yet, and he asked after you to-day. He heard you were coming home."

"Ay! All well and hearty, but me. But it is the will of God to take me, and He knows what's best, Where's Thomas?"

"I am here, father," replied Thomas Godolphin, leaning forward so that his father could see him.

Sir George tried to put up his hand with a beckoning gesture. Thomas understood it: he bent his face close to that pale one, and clasped the nearly inanimate hand in his, listening reverently to the whisper that was breathed so solemnly.

"Thomas, I charge you, never quit Ashlydyat."

"I will not," replied Thomas Godolphin.

"If you bring one home to it, and she would urge you to quit it, urge you until you have no will of your own left, do not yield to it. Do not listen to her. Break with her, let her go forth alone, rather than quit Ashlydyat."

"Father, I will never, of my own free will, leave Ashlydyat. I promise you that, so far as I can hold control over human events, I will live and die in it."

Certainly Sir George understood the promise and its meaning. There could be no mistaking that he did so, by the smile of content which from that moment overspread his countenance, lighting up with satisfaction even his dying eye. He lay for a considerable time still, and then suddenly called for Margery.

"You'll tell your mistress that we can't root up those bushes," he said, as she approached. "It's of no use trying. As fast as they are up from one place they grow in another. They'll not hurt. Tell her I say so."

"I'd get some quicklime, Sir George, and see what that would do," was Margery's response, and the words brought up a smile from one or two of her listeners, solemn moment though it was. Margery's maxim was, never to contradict the dying, but to humour their hallucinations. "Obstinate things, those gorses!" she continued. "But, never you trouble about my mistress, sir: she don't mind them."

The children, standing round his bed, knew quite well that he was alluding to their mother, his first wife. Indeed, Lady Godolphin appeared to have passed entirely from his mind.

Again he lapsed into silence, and remained to all appearance in a stupor, his eyes closed, his breathing ominously slow. Mr. Crosse took his departure, but the Rector and surgeon stayed on yet. The latter saw that the final moment was at hand, and he whispered to Miss Godolphin that she and her sisters might be better from the room. "At any rate," he added, for he saw the dissenting, displeased look which overspread her face, "it might be as well to spare the sight to Cecil."

"No," briefly responded Miss Godolphin. "Our place is here." And they watched on.

With an impulse of strength surprising to see, Sir George suddenly rose up in bed, his eyes fixed with a yearning gaze at the opposite end of the room. Not at the cabinet this time, but at some spot, far, far up, beyond the ceiling, as it appeared. His voice, startling in its clearness, rang through the air, and his arms were outstretched as if he were about to fly.

"Janet! — Janet! — Janet! Oh, my dear Janet, I am coming!"

He fell back and died. Did anything really appear to him, not visible to the mortal eyes around? Were his senses, in that moment of the soul's departure, opened to a glimpse of the world he was about to enter? It cannot be known. Had it been fiction it would not have been written here.

A little later, the bell of All Souls' Church, booming out over the town on the night air, told that Sir George Godolphin had passed away.

It was somewhat remarkable that another funeral, at which Thomas Godolphin was again chief mourner, should follow so closely upon Ethel's. A different sort of ceremony, this: a rare pageant. A pageant which was made up of plumes and trappings and decorated horses, and carriages and mutes and batons, and a line of attendants, and all the other insignia of the illustrious dead. Ethel could be interred simply and quietly, but Sir George must be attended to the grave as the Godolphin of Ashlydyat. I don't suppose poor Sir George rested any the better for it.

Sir George made an equitable will, but it proved a vexatious one to his widow. Thomas had Ashlydyat: George, a fair sum of money; the Miss Godolphins, each her portion; and there were certain bequests to servants. But little was left to Lady Godolphin: indeed, the amount of the bequest was more in accordance with what might be willed to a friend, than to a wife. But, it was not in that that the grievance lay. Lady Godolphin had the Folly, she had Broomhead, and she had an ample income of her own. She was not a particularly covetous woman, and she had never expected or wished that Sir George should greatly take from his family, to add to it. No, it was not that: but the contents of a certain little codicil which was appended to the will. This codicil set forth that every article of furniture or property, which had been removed to the Folly from Ashlydyat, whatever might be its nature, and down to the minutest item, should be returned to Ashlydyat, and become the property of Thomas Godolphin.

It would pretty nearly strip the Folly, and my lady was very wrathful. Not for the value of the things: she sustained no injury there: for the codicil directed that a specified sum of money (their full value) should be handed over to Lady Godolphin to replace them with new at the Folly. But it struck upon her in the light of a slight, and she chose to resent it as one. It was specially enjoined that the things should be placed at Ashlydyat in the old spots where they had formerly stood.

But, be wrathful as she might, grumble as she would, there could be no rebellion to it in action. And Lady Godolphin had to bow to it.

Part 1. Chapter 17.

A ROW ON THE WATER.

The time went on. Three months glided by; nay, four, for April had come in: and positions were changed. Thomas Godolphin was the resident master of Ashlydyat; Janet its acting mistress; Bessy and Cecil lived with them. George had taken up his residence at the bank, with Margery to look after his comforts, never to remove from it, as he supposed, unless Ashlydyat should fall to him. My lady had left the Folly for a permanency (unless any whim should at any time send her back to it), and the Verralls had taken it. It may be said that Lady Godolphin gave up the Folly in a fit of pique. When she found that the things were positively to go out of it, she protested that she would never replace them with others: she would rather throw the money, left for the purpose, into the midst of the sea. She would let it to any one who would take it, and go back to Broomhead for ever. Mr. Verrall heard of this, and made an application for it; and my lady, still smarting, let it to him off-hand, accepting him as a yearly tenant. Whether she repented, or not, when the deed was done, and her anger had cooled down, could not be told: she took her farewell and departed for Scotland without betraying signs of it. Many thought that she would return after a while to the place which she had so eagerly and fondly erected. Perhaps she might: she could get rid of the Verralls at any time by giving them due notice.

Thomas had settled down in his father's place: head of the bank, head of all things, as Sir George had been; Mr. Godolphin, of Ashlydyat. Mr. George was head of himself alone. No one of very particular note was he: but I can tell you that a great many more anxious palpitations were cast to him from gentle bosoms, than were given to unapproachable Thomas. It seemed to be pretty generally conceded that Thomas Godolphin was wedded to the grave of Ethel. Perhaps his establishing his sisters at Ashlydyat, as their home, helped to further the opinion, and dash all hopes; but, very possible hopes from many quarters were wafted secretly to George. He would be no mean prize with his good looks, his excellent position, and his presumptive heirdom to Ashlydyat.

April, I say, had come in. A sunny April. And these several changes had taken place, and the respective parties were settled in their new homes. It went forth to the world that the Verralls intended to give a

brilliant fête, a sort of house-warming, as they styled it; and invitations were circulated far and wide. Amongst those favoured with one, were Mr. and the Miss Godolphins.

Janet was indignant. She could scarcely bring herself to decline it civilly. Cecil, who was not less fond of fetes, and other gay inventions for killing time, than are pretty girls in general, would have given her head to go. It appeared that Mrs. Hastings also declined the invitation: and George Godolphin—who had no intention of declining it on his own score—resolved to know the reason why.

Though not a frequent visitor at the Rectory: for he could not go there much, in the teeth of discouragement so evident as had latterly been shown to him by Mr. Hastings, and depended mostly upon chance meetings in the street for keeping in exercise his love-vows to Maria:

George resolved to go boldly down that evening.

Down he accordingly went. And was shown into an empty room. The Rector and Mrs. Hastings were out, the servant said, and the young ladies were in the study with the boys. She would tell them.

Maria came to him. There was no mistaking her start of surprise when she saw him, or, the rush of emotion which overspread her face.

“Who did you think it was?” asked George.

“I thought it was your brother. She said ‘Mr. Godolphin.’ Grace will be down in an instant.”

“Will she?” returned George. “You had better go and tell her it’s Mr. George, and not Mr. Godolphin, and then she won’t hurry herself. I am not a favourite with Miss Grace, I fancy.”

Maria coloured. She had no excuse to offer for the fact, and could not say that it was untrue. George stood with his elbow on the mantel-piece, looking down at her.

"Maria, I hear that Mrs. Hastings has declined to go to the Folly on Thursday. What's that for?"

"I don't know," replied Maria. "We do not go very much amidst those unusually grand scenes," she added, laughing. "Mamma says she always feels as much out of place in them as a fish does out of water. And I think, if papa had his own wish, we should never go within a mile of anything of the sort. He likes quiet social visiting, but not such entertainments as the Verralls give. He and mamma were consulting for a few minutes over the invitation, and then she directed Grace to write and decline it."

"It is an awful shame!" responded George. "I thought I should have had you with me for a few hours that day, at any rate, Maria."

Maria lifted her eyes. "It had nothing to do with me, George. I was not invited."

"Not invited!" repeated George Godolphin.

"Only Grace. 'Mrs. and Miss Hastings.'"

"What was that for?" he exclaimed. "Why were you left out?"

"I do not know," replied Maria, bending her eyelids and speaking with involuntary hesitation. In her heart of hearts, Maria believe that she did know: but the last person she would have hinted it to, Was George Godolphin. "Perhaps," she added, "it may have been an omission, an oversight? Or, they may have so many to invite that they can only dispense their cards charily."

"Moonshine!" cried George. "I shall take upon myself to ask Verrall why you were left out."

"Oh, George! pray don't," she uttered, feeling an invincible repugnance to have her name brought up in any such way. "Why should you? Had the invitation been sent to me, I should not have gone."

"It is a slight," he persisted. "A little later, and let any dare to show slight to you. They shall be taught better. A slight to you will be a slight to me."

Maria looked at him timidly, and he bent his head with a fond smile.

"I shall want somebody to keep house for me at the bank, you know, Maria."

She coloured even to tears. Mr. George was proceeding to erase them after his own gallant fashion, when he was summarily brought-to by the entrance of Grace Hastings.

There was certainly no love lost between them. Grace did not like George, George did not like Grace. She took her seat demurely in her Mother's chair of state, with every apparent intention of sitting out his visit. So George cut it short.

"What did he come for?" Grace asked of Maria, when the servant had showed him out.

"He came to call."

"You appeared to be in very close conversation when I came into the room," pursued Grace, searching Maria with her keen eyes. "May I ask its purport?"

"Its purport was nothing wrong," said Maria, her cheeks deepening under the inspection. "You question me, Grace, as if I were a child, and you possessed a right over me."

"Well," said Grace equably. "What was he talking of?"

Yielding, timid, sensitive Maria was one of the last to resist this sort of importunity. "We had been talking of the Verralls not including me in the invitation. George said it was a slight."

"As of course it was," assented Grace. "And, for that fact alone, I am glad mamma sent them a refusal. It was Charlotte Pain's doings. She does not care that you should be brought too much into contact with George Godolphin, lest her chance should be perilled. Now, Maria, don't pretend to look at me in that incredulous manner! You know as well as I do that George has a stupid liking for you; or, at least, acts as though he had. And that naturally is not pleasant to Charlotte Pain."

Maria knew well that Grace had divined the true cause for the slight. She stood for a few minutes looking silent and humble: an intimation, even from Grace, that George "liked her," jarred upon her refined sensitiveness, when openly alluded to. But that feeling was almost lost in the dull pain which the hint touching Charlotte had called up.

"Charlotte Pain is nothing to George Godolphin," she resentfully said.

"Charlotte Pain is," responded Grace. "And if your eyes are not yet opened to it, they ought to be. She is to be his wife."

"Oh no, she is not," hastily said Maria.

"Maria, I tell you that she is. I know it."

Now Grace Hastings rarely made an assertion unless she had good grounds for it. Maria knew that. And the dull pain at her heart grew and grew, until it was beating with a sharp agony. She appeared impassive enough, looking down at her thin gold chain, which her fingers were unconsciously wreathing into knots. "You cannot know it, Grace."

"I tell you I do. Mind you, I don't say that they will inevitably be married; only, that they contemplate being so at present. Charlotte does well not to make too sure of him! George Godolphin may see half a dozen yet whom he will prefer to Charlotte Pain, in his roving, butterfly nature."

Was Grace right? Not ten minutes before, Maria had listened to words from his lips which most surely intimated that it was herself George had chosen. Who was Charlotte?—who was Charlotte Pain, that she should thus thrust herself between them?

April, as we learn by its reputation, and by our own experience, mocks us with its weather: and not a few envious criticisers had prophesied showers, if not snow, for the fête at Lady Godolphin's Folly. The unusually lovely weather which had marked the month, so far as it had gone, had put it into Mrs. Verrall's bead to give an outdoor entertainment. Mr. Verrall had himself suggested that the weather might change; that there was no dependence, at this season

of the year, to be placed on it. But she would not give up her project. If the worst came to the worst at the last moment, she said, they must do the best they could with the people indoors.

But, for once, the weather was not fickle. The day rose warm, calm, beautifully bright, and by three o'clock in the afternoon most of the gay revellers had gathered at the Folly.

The grounds were dotted with them. These grounds, by the way, were chiefly the grounds of Ashlydyat; those belonging to the Folly being exceedingly limited in extent. Janet Godolphin drew down the blinds of Ashlydyat, that the eyesore might be shut out: but Cecil stole away to her room, and made herself a peep-hole—as the young Hastingses had done at Ethel Grame's funeral—and looked out with covetous eyes. Janet had said something to Thomas about sending a hint to the Folly that the domains of Ashlydyat would not be open to the guests: but Thomas, with his quiet good sense, had negatived it.

Graceless George arrived as large as life, one of the first. He was making himself conspicuous among the many-coloured groups—or, perhaps it was, that they made him so, by gathering round him—when two figures in mourning came gliding up to him, one of whom spoke.

"How do you do, Mr. George Godolphin?"

George turned. And—careless and thoughtless as he was, graceless as he was reported to be—a shock of surprise, not unmixed with indignation, swept over his feelings: for those standing before him were Lady Sarah and Miss Grame.

She—Sarah Anne—looked like a shadow still; peevish, white, discontented. What brought them there? Was it thus that they showed their regret for the dead Ethel?—Was it seemly that Sarah Anne should appear at a fête of gaiety in her weak, sickly state; not yet recovered from the effects of the fever; not yet out of the first deep mourning worn for Ethel?

"How do you do, Lady Sarah?" very gravely responded George Godolphin.

Lady Sarah may have discerned somewhat of his feeling from the expression of his face. Not that he intentionally suffered it to rise in reproof of her: George Godolphin did not set himself up in judgment against his fellows. He, indeed! Lady Sarah drew him aside with her, after he had shaken hands with Sarah Anne.

"I am sure it must look strange to you to see us here, Mr. George. But, poor child, she continues so weak and poorly, that I scarcely know what to do with her. She set her heart upon coming to this fête. Since Mrs. Verrall's card arrived, she has talked of nothing else, and I thought it would not do to cross her. Is Mr. Godolphin here?"

Oh no," replied George, with more haste than he need have spoken.

I thought he would not be. I remarked so to Sarah Anne, when she expressed a hope of seeing him: indeed, I think it was that hope which chiefly urged her to come. What have we done to him, Mr. George? He scarcely ever comes near the house."

"I don't know anything about it," returned George. "I can see that my brother still feels his loss deeply. It may be, Lady Sarah, that visits to your house remind him too forcibly of Ethel."

Lady Sarah lowered her voice to a confidential whisper: "Will he ever marry, think you?"

At present I should be inclined to say he never would," answered George, wondering what in the world it could matter to Lady Sarah, and thinking she showed little sorrow or consideration for the memory of Ethel. "But time works surprising changes," he added: "and time may marry Mr. Godolphin."

Lady Sarah paused. "How do you think she looks—my poor child?"

"Miserable," all but rose to the tip of George's tongue. "She does not look well," he said aloud.

"And she does so regret her dear sister; she's grieving after her always," said Lady Sarah, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I don't believe it," thought George to himself.

"How do you like your new residence?" she resumed, passing with little ceremony to another topic.

"I like it very well. All places are pretty much alike to a bachelor, Lady Sarah."

"Ah, so they are. You won't remain a bachelor very long," continued Lady Sarah, with a smile of archness.

"Not so very long, I dare say," frankly acknowledged Mr. George. "It is possible I may put my bead in the noose some time in the next ten years."

She would have detained him further, but George did not care to be detained. He went after more attractive companionship.

Chance, or premeditation, led him to Charlotte Pain. Charlotte had all her attractions about her that day. Her bright green silk dress—green was a favourite colour of hers—with its white lace mantle, was frequently to be seen by George Godolphin's side. Once they strayed to the borders of the stream, in a remote part of the grounds. Several were gathered here. A row on the water had been proposed, and a boat stood ready. A small boat, holding very few; but, of those few, George and Charlotte made two.

Could George Godolphin have foreseen what that simple little excursion in the boat was to do for him, he had never entered it. How is it, that no shadow of warning comes over us at these times? How many a day's pleasure, begun as a jubilee, how many a voyage, entered upon in hope, ends but in death! Not a fortnight since; since now, the very hour at which I am writing; a fine young lad, fresh from his studies, was going out to one of our colonies, full of youth, of hope, of prospects. Two ships were available for the passage, one as eligible as the other: which should he choose? It seemed not to matter which of them, and the choice was made. Could no warning rise up to his aid, ever so indefinite, and point away from the chosen one and say it must be shunned? The vessel sailed. And she went down—within sight of land—not three days out; and every soul on board, except one, perished. "If we had only chosen the other ship for him!" wail that lad's mourning friends. Ay! if we could only lift the veil, what mistakes might be avoided!

George Godolphin, strong and active, took the oars. And when they had rowed about to their heart's content, and George was in a white heat with exertion, they bethought themselves that they would land for a while on what was called the mock island: a mossy spot, green and tempting to the eye. In stepping ashore, Charlotte Pain tripped, lost her balance, and would have been in the water but for George. He saved her, but he could not save her parasol: a dainty parasol, for which Miss Charlotte had given three guineas only the previous day. She naturally shrieked when it fell into the water and Godolphin, in recovering it, nearly lost his balance, and went in after the parasol. Nearly; not quite: he got himself pretty wet, but he made light of it, and sat himself down on the grassy island with the .rest

They were all young. Old people seldom care to venture into these shallow skiffs: but, had any of mature age been there, experienced in chills and rheumatism, they would certainly have ordered George Godolphin home at his utmost speed, for a change of clothes, and perhaps a glass of brandy.

Charlotte Pain was shaking the wet from her parasol, when some one noticed the dripping state of George's coat. "It wants shaking also," said they. "Do pray take it off, Mr. George Godolphin!"

George took it off, shook it well, and laid it out in the sun to dry. And down he sat again, in his shirt-sleeves, passing some jokes upon his state of costume, and requesting to know what apology he must make for it.

By-and-by he began to feel rather chilled: in fact, he grew so cold that he put on his coat again, damp as it was. It might have occurred to him that the intense perspiration he had been in had struck inwardly, but-it did not. In the evening he was dancing away with the best of them apparently having escaped all ill effects from the wetting, and thinking no further of it.

Eh, but the young are heedless! as Janet would have said.

Part I. Chapter 18.

STRAW IN THE STREETS.

Ankle-deep before the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin, and for some distance on either side; ankle-deep down Crosse Street as far as you could see, lay masses of straw. As carriages came up to traverse it, their drivers checked their horses and drove them at a foot-pace, raising their own heads to look up at the windows of the dwelling; for they knew that one was lying there hovering between life and death.

It was George Godolphin. Imprudent George! Healthy and strong as he might be, sound as his constitution was, that little episode of the fête-day had told upon him. Few men can do such things with impunity, and come out of them unscathed. "What was a bit of a ducking; and that only a partial one? Nothing." As George himself said to some remonstrator on the following day. It is not much, certainly, to those who are used to it: but taken in conjunction with a white heat, and with an hour or two's cooling upon the grass afterwards, in the airy undress of shirt-sleeves, it is a great deal.

It had proved a great deal for George Godolphin. An attack of rheumatic fever supervened, dangerous and violent, and neither Dr. Beale nor Mr. Snow could give a guess as to whether he would live or die. Miss Godolphin had removed to the bank to share with Margery the task of nursing him. Knockers were muffled; bells were tied up; straw, as you hear, was laid in the streets; people passed in and out, even at the swing doors, when they went to transact business, with a softened tread: and as they counted the cash for their cheques, leaned over the counter, and asked the clerks in a whisper whether Mr. George was yet alive. Yes, he was alive, the clerks could always answer, but it was as much as they could say.

It continued to be "as much as they could say" for nearly a month, and then George Godolphin began to improve. But so slowly! day after day seemed to pass without visible sign.

How bore up Maria Hastings? None could know the dread, the grief, that was at work within her, or the deep love she felt for George Godolphin. Her nights were sleepless, her days were restless; she

lost her appetite, her energy, almost her health. Mrs. Hastings wondered what was wrong with her, and hoped Maria was not going to be one of those sickly ones who always seem to fade in the spring.

Maria could speak out her sorrow to none. Grace would not have sympathized with any feeling so strong, whose object was George Godolphin. And had Grace sympathized ever so, Maria would not have spoken it. She possessed that shrinking reticence of feeling, that refined sensitiveness, to which betraying its own emotions to another would be little less than death. Maria could not trust her voice to ask after him: when Mr. Hastings or her brothers would come in and say (as they had more than once), "There's a report in the town that George Godolphin's dead," she could not press upon them her eager questions, and ask, "Is it likely to be true? Are there any signs that it is true?" Once, when this rumour came in, Maria made an excuse to go out: some trifle to be purchased in the town, she said to Mrs. Hastings: and went down the Street inwardly shivering, too agitated to notice acquaintances whom she met. Opposite the bank, she stole glances up at its private windows, and saw that the blinds were down. In point of fact, this told nothing, for the blinds had been kept down much since George's illness, the servants not troubling themselves to draw them up: but to the fears of Maria Hastings, it spoke volumes. Sick, trembling, she continued her way mechanically: she did not dare to stop, even for a moment, or to show, in her timidity, as much as the anxiety of an indifferent friend. At that moment Mr. Snow came out of the house, and crossed over.

Maria stopped then. Surely she might halt to speak to the surgeon without being suspected of undue interest in Mr. George Godolphin. She even brought out the words, as Mr. Snow shook hands with her:

"You have been to the bank?"

"Yes, poor fellow; he is in a critical state," was Mr. Snow's answer. "But I think there's a faint indication of improvement, this afternoon."

In the revulsion of feeling which the words gave, Maria forgot her caution. "He is not dead, then?" she exclaimed, all too eagerly, her face turning to a glowing crimson, her lips apart with emotion.

Mr. Snow gathered in the signs, and a grave expression stole over his lips. But the next minute he was smiling openly. "No, he is not dead yet, Miss Maria; and we must see what we can do towards keeping him alive." Maria turned home again with a beating and a thankful heart.

A weary, weary summer for George Godolphin—a weary, weary illness. It was more than two months before he rose from his bed at all, and it was nearly two more before he went down the stairs of the dwelling house. A fine, balmy day it was, that one in June, when George left his bed for the first time, and was put in the easy-chair, wrapped up in blankets. The sky was blue, the sun was warm, and bees and butterflies sported in the summer air. George turned his weary eyes, weary with pain and weakness, towards the cheering signs of outdoor life, and wondered whether he should ever be abroad again.

It was August before that time came. Early in that month the close carriage of Ashlydyat waited at the door, to give Mr. George his first airing. A shadowy object he looked, Mr. Snow on one side of him, Margery on the other; Janet, who would be his companion in the drive, following. They got him downstairs between them, and into the carriage. From that time his recovery, though slow, was progressive, and in another week he was removed for change to Ashlydyat. He could walk abroad then with two sticks, or with a stick and somebody's arm. George, who was getting up his spirits wonderfully, declared that he and his sticks should be made into a picture and sent to the next exhibition of native artists.

One morning, he and his sticks were sunning themselves in the porch at Ashlydyat, when a stranger approached and accosted him. A gentlemanly-looking man, in a straw hat, with a light travelling overcoat thrown upon his arm. George looked a gentleman also, in spite of his dilapidated health and his sticks, and the stranger raised his hat with something of foreign urbanity.

"Does Mr. Verrall reside here?"

"No," replied George.

A hard, defiant sort of expression rose immediately to the stranger's face. It almost seemed to imply that George was deceiving him: and

his next words bore out the impression. "I have been informed that he does reside here," he said, with a stress upon the "does."

"He did reside here," replied George Godolphin: "but he does so no longer. That is where Mr. Verrall lives," he added, pointing one of his sticks at the white walls of Lady Godolphin's Folly.

The stranger wheeled round on his heel, took a survey of it, and then lifted his hat again, apparently satisfied. "Thank you, sir," he said. "The mistake was mine. Good morning."

George watched him away as he strode with a firm, quick, elastic step towards the Folly. George wondered when he should walk again with the same step. Perhaps the idea, or the desire to do so, impelled him to try it then. He rose from his seat and went tottering out, drawing his sticks with him. It was a tempting morning, and George strolled on in its brightness, resting now on one bench, now on another, and then bearing on again.

"I might get as far as the Folly, if I took my time," he said to himself. "Would it not be a surprise to them!"

So he bore onwards to the Folly, as the stranger had done. He was drawing very near to it, was seated, in fact, on the last bench that he intended to rest on, when Mr. Verrall passed him.

"Have you had a gentleman inquiring for you?" George asked him.

"What gentleman?" demanded Mr. Verrall.

"A stranger. He came to Ashlydyat, supposing you lived there. I sent him to the Folly."

"Describe him, will you?" said Mr. Verrall.

"I noticed nothing much to describe," replied George. "He wore a straw hat, and had a thin tweed coat over his arm. I should fancy he had just come off a journey."

Mr. Verrall left George where he was, and went back to the Folly. George rose and followed more slowly. But when he got beyond the

trees, he saw that Mr. Verrall must have plunged into them: as if he would go into the Folly by the servants' entrance. George crossed the lawn, and made straight for the drawing-room windows, which stood open.

Scarcely had he entered, and flung himself into the first easy-chair, when he saw the same stranger approach the house. Where had he been, not to have found it before? But George immediately divined that he had taken the wrong turning near the ash-trees, and so had had the pleasure of a round to Prior's Ash and back again. The room was empty, and George sat recovering breath and enjoying the luxury of a rest, when the stranger's knock resounded at the hall-door.

A servant, as he could hear, came forth to open it; but, before that was effected, flying footsteps followed the man across the hall, and he was called, in the voice of Charlotte Pain.

"James," said she, in a half-whisper, which came distinctly to the ear of George Godolphin, "should that be any one for Mr. Verrall, say nothing, but show him in here."

A second room, a smaller one, stood between the one George had entered, and the hall. It opened both to the drawing-room and the hall; in fact, it served as a sort of anteroom to the drawing-room. It was into this room that the stranger was shown.

Charlotte, who had taken a seat, and was toying with some embroidery-work, making believe to be busy over it, rose at his entrance, with the prettiest air of surprise imaginable. He could have staked his life, had he been required to do it, that she knew nothing whatever of his approach until that identical moment, when James threw open the door, and announced, "A gentleman, ma'am." James had been unable to announce him in more definite terms. Upon his asking the stranger for a name, the curt answer had been, "Never mind the name. Mr. Verrall knows me."

Charlotte rose. And the gentleman's abruptness changed to courtesy at the sight of her. "I wish to see Mr. Verrall," he said.

"Mr. Verrall is in town," replied Charlotte.

"In town!" was the answer, delivered in an accent of excessive surprise. "Do you mean in London, madam?"

"Certainly," rejoined Charlotte. "In London."

"But he only left London last night to come here!" was the stranger's answer.

It brought Charlotte to a pause. Self-possessed as she was, she had to think a moment before hazarding another assertion. "May I inquire how you know that he left London last night for this?" she asked.

"Because, madam, I had business yesterday of the very last importance with Mr. Verrall. He made the appointment himself, for three o'clock. I went at three: and, could not find him. I went at four, and waited an hour, with a like result. I went again at seven, and then I was told that Mr. Verrall had been telegraphed for to his country seat and had started. I had some difficulty in finding out where his country seat was situated, but I succeeded in doing that: and I followed him in the course of the night."

"How very unfortunate!" exclaimed Charlotte, who had obtained her clue. "He was telegraphed for yesterday, and arrived in answer to it, getting here very late last night. But he could not stay. He said he had business to attend to in London, and he left here this morning by an early train. Will you oblige me with your name?" she added.

"My name, madam, is Appleby. It is possible that you may have heard Mr. Verrall mention it, if, as I presume, I have the honour of speaking to Mrs. Verrall."

Charlotte did not undeceive him. "When did you see Mr. Verrall last?" she suddenly inquired, as if the thought had just struck her.

"The day before yesterday. I saw him three times that day, and he made the appointment for the following one."

"I am so sorry you should have had a useless journey," said Charlotte, with much sympathy.

"I am sorry also," said the stranger. "Sorry for the delay this causes in certain arrangements; a delay I can ill afford. I will wish you good morning, madam, and start back by the first train."

Charlotte touched the bell, and curtsied her adieu. The stranger had the door open, when he turned round, and spoke again.

"I presume I may entirely rely upon what you tell me—that Verrall has gone back?"

"Oh, certainly," answered Charlotte.

Now, every syllable of this colloquy had reached the ears of George Godolphin. It puzzled him not a little. Were there two Verralls? The Verrall of the Folly, with whom he had so recently exchanged words, had certainly not been in London for a fortnight past, or anywhere else but in that neighbourhood. And what did Charlotte mean, by saying he had gone to town that morning?

Charlotte came in, singing a scrap of a song. She started when she saw George, and then flew to him in a glow of delight, holding out her hands.

What could he do, but take them? What could he do, but draw Charlotte down beside him on the sofa, holding them still? "How pleased I am to see you!" exclaimed Charlotte. "I shall think the dear old times are coming round again."

"Charlotte mia, do you know what I have been obliged to hear? That interesting colloquy you have been taking part in in the next room."

Charlotte burst into a laugh. From the moment when she first caught a glimpse of George, seated there, she had felt sure that he must have heard it. "Did I do it well?" she cried, triumphantly.

"How could you invent such fibs?"

"Verrall came upstairs to me and Kate," said Charlotte, laughing more merrily than before. "He said there was somebody going to call here, he thought with a begging petition, and he did not care to see him. Would I go and put the man off? I asked him how I should put

him off, and he answered, 'Any way. Say he had gone to London, if I liked.'"

Was Charlotte telling truth or falsehood? That there was more in all this than met the eye was evident. It was no business, however, of George Godolphin's, neither did he make it his.

"And you have really walked here all the way by yourself!" she resumed. "I am so glad! You will get well now all one way."

"I don't know about getting well 'all one way,' Charlotte. The doctors have been ordering me away for the winter."

"For the winter!" repeated Charlotte, her tone growing sober. "What for? Where to?"

"To some place where the skies are more genial than in this cold climate of ours," replied George. "If I wish to get thoroughly well, they say, I must start off next month, September, and not return until April."

"But—should you go alone?"

"There's the worst of it. We poor bachelors are like stray sheep—nobody owning us, nobody caring for us."

"Take somebody with you," suggested Charlotte.

"That's easier said than done," said George.

Charlotte threw one of her brilliant glances at him. She had risen, and was standing before him, all her attractions in full play. "There's an old saying, Mr. George Godolphin, that where there's a will, there's a way," quoth she.

George made a gallant answer, and they were progressing in each other's good graces to their own content, when an interruption came to it. The same servant who had opened the door to the stranger entered.

"Miss Pain, if you please, my master says will you go up to him."

"I declare you make me forget everything," cried Charlotte to George, as she left the room. And picking up her King Charley, she threw it at him. "There! take care of him, Mr. George Godolphin, until I come back again."

A few minutes after, George saw Mr. Verrall leave the house and cross the lawn. A servant behind him was bearing a small portmanteau and an overcoat, similar to the one the stranger had carried on his arm. Was Mr. Verrall also going to London?

Part 1. Chapter 19.

ONE STICK DISCARDED.

The morning sun shone on the green lawn, on the clustering flowers, rich in many colours, sweet in their perfume, before the breakfast-room at Ashlydyat. The room itself was in shadow: as it is pleasant in summer for a room to be: but the windows stood open to the delights of outdoor life.

Janet presided at the breakfast-table. She always did preside there. Thomas, Bessy, and Cecil were disposed around her; leaving the side next the windows vacant, that nothing might come between them and the view of the summer's morning. A summer that would soon be on the wane, for September was approaching.

"She ought to be here by four o'clock," observed Bessy, continuing the conversation. "Otherwise, she cannot be here until seven. No train comes in from Farnley between four o'clock and seven, does it, Thomas?"

"I think not," replied Thomas Godolphin. "But I really know very little about their branch lines. Stay. Farnley? No: I remember: I am sure that nothing comes in between four and seven."

"Don't fash yourselves," said Janet with composure, who had been occupied with the urn. "When Mrs. Briscow sends me word she will arrive by the afternoon train, I know she can only mean the one that gets here at four o'clock: and I shall be there at four in the carriage to meet her. She is early in her ideas, and she would have called seven the night train."

Cecil, who appeared to be more engaged in toying with the black ribbons that were flowing from the white sleeves round her pretty wrists, than in taking her breakfast, looked up at her sister. "How long is it since she was here last, Janet?"

"She was here the summer after your mother died."

"All that time!" exclaimed Cecil. "It is very good of her to leave her home at her age, and come amongst us once again."

"It is George who is bringing her here; I am sure of that," returned Janet. "She was so concerned about his illness. She wants to see as now he is getting better. George was always her favourite."

"How is George this morning?" inquired Thomas Godolphin.

"George is alive and pretty well," replied a voice from the door, which had opened. There stood George himself.

Alive decidedly; but weak and wan still. He could walk with the help of one stick now.

"If I don't make an effort—as somebody says, in that bookcase—I may remain a puny invalid for ever, like a woman. I thought I'd try and surprise you."

They made a place for him, and placed a chair, and set good things before him; all as affectionate eagerness. But George Godolphin could not accomplish much breakfast yet. "My appetite is capricious, Janet," he observed. "I think to-morrow I will try chocolate and milk."

"A cup can be made at once, George, if you would like it."

"No, I don't care about it now. I suppose the doctors are right that I can't get into proper order again, without change. A dull time of it, I shall have, whatever place they may exile me to."

A question had been mooted, bringing somewhat of vexation in its discussion, as to who should accompany George. Whether he should be accompanied at all, in what he was pleased to term his exile: and if so, which of them should be chosen. Janet could not go; or thought she could not; Ashlydyat wanted her. Bessy was deep in her schools, her district-visiting, in parish affairs generally, and openly said she did not care to quit them just now. Cecil was perfectly ready and willing. Had George been going to the wilds of Africa, Cecil would have entered on the journey with enthusiasm: the outer world had attractions for Cecil and her inexperience. But Janet did not deem it expedient to trust pretty Cecil to the sole guardianship of thoughtless George, and that was put down ere Cecil had well spoken of it. George's private opinion was—and he spoke it publicly—that he should be better without any of them than with

them; that they would "only be a trouble." On one point, he turned restive. Janet's idea had been to despatch Margery with him; to see after his comforts, his medicines, his well-aired beds, and his beef-tea. Not if he knew it, George answered. Why not set him up at once with a lady's-maid, and a nurse from the hospitals, in addition to Margery? And he was pleased to indulge in so much ridicule upon the point, as to anger Janet and offend Margery.

"I wish I knew some fellow who was going yachting for the next six months, and would give me boat-room," observed George, stirring his tea listlessly.

"That would be an improvement!" said Janet, speaking in satire. "Six months' sea-sickness and sea-drenching would about do for you what the fever has left undone."

"So it might," said George. "Only that we get over sea-sickness in a couple of days, and sea-drenchings are wholesome. However, don't let it disturb your placidity: the yacht is wanting, and I am not likely to have the opportunity of trying it. No, thank you, Janet" — rejecting a plate she was offering him — "I cannot eat anything."

"Mrs. Briscow comes to-day, George," observed Bessy. "Janet is going to meet her at the station at four. She is coming purposely to see you."

"Very amiable of the old lady!" responded George. "It's a pity I am going out to dinner."

Thomas looked surprised. George was not yet in precisely dinner-visiting condition.

"I have promised Mrs. Verrall to get as far as the Folly this afternoon, and stay and dine with them. En famille, you know."

"Mr. Verrall is not at home," said Bessy.

"But she and Charlotte are," responded George.

"You know you must not be out in the night air, George."

"I shall be home by sundown, or thereabouts, not that the night air would hurt me now."

"You cannot take rich dishes yet," urged Bessy again.

"Bien entendu. Mrs. Verrall has ordered an array of invalid ones: mutton-broth a l'eau, and boiled whiting au naturel," responded George, who appeared to have an answer ready for all dissentient propositions.

Janet interposed, looking and speaking very gravely. "George, it will be a great mark of disrespect to Mrs. Briscow, the lifelong friend of your father and your mother, not to be at home to sit at table with her the first day she is here. Only one thing could excuse your absence — urgent business. And, that, you have not to plead."

George answered tartly. He was weak from his recent illness, and like many others under the same circumstances, did not like being crossed in trifles. "Janet, you are unreasonable. As if it were necessary that I should break a promise, just for the purpose of dining with an old woman! There will be plenty of other days to dine with her. And I shall be at home this evening before you have risen from table."

"I beg you to speak of Mrs. Briscow with more respect, George. It cannot matter whether you dine at the Verralls' to-day or another day," persisted Janet. "I would not say a word against it, were it an engagement of consequence. You can go to the Folly any day."

"But I choose to go to-day," said George.

"Janet fixed her deep eyes upon him, her gaze full of sad penetration, her voice changed to one of mourning. "Have those women cast a spell upon you, lad?"

It drove away George's ill-humour. He burst into a laugh, and returned the gaze: openly enough. "Not they, Janet. Mrs. Verrall may have spells to cast, for aught I know: it's Verrall's business, not mine: 'but they have certainly not been directed to me. And Charlotte —"

"Ay," put in Janet in a lower tone, "what of Charlotte Pain?"

"This, Janet. That I can steer clear of any spells cast by Charlotte Pain. Not but that I admire Charlotte very much," he added in a spirit of mischief. "I assure you I am quite a slave to her fascinations."

"Keep you out of her fascinations, lad," returned Janet in a tone of solemn meaning. "It is my first and best advice to you."

"I will, Janet, when I find them growing dangerous."

Janet said no more. There was that expression on her countenance which they well knew; telling of grievous dissatisfaction.

Rising earlier than his strength was as yet equal to, told upon George Godolphin: and by the middle of the day he felt so full of weariness and lassitude, that he was glad to throw himself on to the sofa in the large drawing-room, quiet and unoccupied then, wheeling the couch first of all with his feeble strength, close to the window, that he might be in the sunshine. Its warmth was grateful to him. He dropped asleep, and only woke considerably later, at the entrance of Cecil.

Cecil was dressed for the day, in a thin, flowing black dress, a jet necklace on her slender neck, jet bracelets on her fair arms. A fair flower was Cecilia Godolphin: none fairer within all the precincts of Priors Ash. She knelt down by George and kissed him.

"We have been in to glance at you two or three times, George. Margery has prepared something nice for you, and would have aroused you to take it, only she says sleep will do you as much good as food."

"What's the time?" asked George, too indolent to take his own watch from his pocket.

"Half-past three."

"Nonsense!" cried George, partially starting up. "It can't be so late as that."

"It is, indeed. Janet has just driven off to the station. Don't rise this minute: you are hot."

"I wonder Janet let me sleep so long!"

"Why should she not? Janet has been very busy all day, and very —"

"Cross?" put in George.

"I was going to say silent," replied Cecil. "You vexed her this morning, George."

"There was nothing that she need have been vexed at," responded Mr. George.

Cecil remained for a few moments without speaking. "I think Janet is afraid of Charlotte Pain," she presently said.

"Afraid of Charlotte Pain! In what way?"

"George " — lowering her voice, and running her fingers caressingly through his bright hair as he lay — " I wish you would let me ask you something."

"Ask away," replied George.

"Ay, but will you answer me?"

"That depends," he laughed. "Ask away, Cely."

"Is there anything between you and Charlotte Pain?"

"Plenty," returned George in the lightest possible tone. "As there is between me and a dozen more young ladies. Charlotte, happening to be the nearest, gets most of me just now."

" Plenty of what?"

"Talking and laughing and gossip. That's about the extent of it, pretty Cely."

Cecil wished he would be more serious. "Shall you be likely to marry her?" she breathed.

"Just as likely as I shall be to marry you," and he spoke seriously now.

Cecil drew a sigh of relief. "Then, George, I will tell you what it is that has helped to vex Janet. You know our servants get talking to Mrs. Verrall's, and her servants to ours. And the news was brought here that Charlotte Pain has said she should probably be going on a journey: a journey abroad, for six months or so: to some place where she should remain the winter. Margery told Janet: and —and —"

"You construed it, between you, that Charlotte was going to be a partner in my exile! What droll people you must all be!"

"There's no doubt, George, that Charlotte Pain was heard to say it."

"I don't know what she may have been heard to say. It could have borne no reference to my movements. Cecil?"

"Well?"

"Did you ever hear of old Max's hounds losing their scent?"

"No—I don't know. What do you mean?"

And while George Godolphin was laughing at her puzzled look, Margery came in. "Are you almost famished, Mr. George? How could you think of dropping off to sleep till you had had something to sustain you?"

"We often do things that we don't 'think' to do, Margery," quoth he, as he rose from the sofa.

Nothing more true, Mr. George Godolphin.

Ere long he was on his way to Mrs. Verrall's. Notwithstanding Janet's displeasure, he had no idea of foregoing his engagement. The society of two attractive women had more charms for listless George than quiet Ashlydyat. It was a lovely afternoon, less hot than it had been of late, and George really enjoyed it. He was beginning to walk so much better. That long sleep had rested and refreshed him, and he

believed that he could walk well into Prior's Ash. "I'll try it tomorrow," thought George.

Up the steps, over the terrace, across to the open windows of the Folly. It was the easiest way in, and George was not given to unnecessary ceremony. He supposed he might find the ladies in the drawing-room, and he stepped over the threshold.

Only one was there. Charlotte. She did not see him enter. She was before a pier-glass, holding up her dog, King Charley, that he might snarl and bark at the imaginary King Charley in the glass.

That other dog of hers, the ugly Scotch terrier which you have heard of before, and a third, looking something like a bull-dog, were leaping and howling at her feet. It would appear that nothing pleased Charlotte better than putting her dogs into a fury. Charlotte wore a dark blue silk dress with shaded flounces, and a lighter blue silk jacket: the latter, 'ornamented with braidings and buttons of silver, somewhat after the fashion of her green riding-habit, and fitting as tightly to the shape. A well-formed shape!—and George Godolphin thought so, as she stood with her arms lifted, setting the dogs at the glass.

"Hi, King! Seize him, Charley! Go at him!—hiss! Tear him! bite him!—hiss-ss-ss!— The noisy reception by the other dogs of Mr. George Godolphin, brought the young lady's words and her pretty employment to a standstill. She released the imprisoned dog from her arms, letting him drop anywhere, and turned to George Godolphin.

"Have you come at last? I had given you up! I expected you an hour and a half ago."

"And, to while away the time, you set your dogs on to snarl and fight!" returned he, as he took her hand. "I wonder you don't go distracted with the noise, Charlotte!"

"You don't like dogs! I often tell you so."

"Yes, I do—in their proper places."

Charlotte turned from him with a pout. The terrier jumped upon her.

"Down, Pluto, down! A gentleman here thinks I ought to hold you poor dogs at arm's length."

"At the yard's length, if you please, Charlotte," corrected George, who did not feel inclined to compromise his opinion. "Hark at them! they might be heard at Prior's Ash."

"And his name's George Godolphin, good Pluto!" went on Charlotte, doing all she possibly could, in a quiet way, to excite the dogs. "Down, then Pluto! down!"

"I should muzzle you, Mr. Pluto, if you were mine," cried George, as the dog jumped up at him furiously, and then turned to attack his former adversary. "Pluto!" he continued, meaningly: "who gave him that name, Charlotte?"

"I did," avowed Charlotte. "And I named this other one King Charley, after his species. And this one is Deuce. What have you to say against the names?"

"Nothing," said George. "I think them very good, appropriate names," he added, his lips parting.

They were certainly very good dogs—if to make a most excruciating noise constitutes merit. George Godolphin, his nerves still in a shattered condition, lifted his hand wearily to his forehead. It brought Charlotte Pain to her recollection.

"Oh, George, I forgot! I did, really! I forgot you were not as strong yet as the rest of us. Be quiet, then, you three horrid brutes! Be quiet, will you! Go off, and quarrel outside."

Using her pointed toe rather liberally, Charlotte set herself to scatter the dogs. They were not very obedient. As soon as one was got out another sprang in, the noise never ceasing. Charlotte snatched up a basket of macaroons that happened to be on a side-table, and scattered the cakes on the terrace. "There, quarrel and fight over those!"

She put down the empty basket, closed the window to shut out the noise, and turned to George. Spreading out her dress on either side,

after the manner once in vogue in ancient ballrooms she dropped him an elaborate curtsy.

"Mr. George Godolphin, what honour do you suppose is thrust upon me to-day?"

"You must tell me, Charlotte, if it's one you wish me to know," he answered. "I can never attempt to guess when I feel tired, as I do now."

"Your walk has tired you?"

"I suppose it has. Though I thought how well I felt as I came along."

"The great honour of entertaining you all by my own self is delegated to me," cried Charlotte gaily, dropping another curtsy. "I hope we shall not quarrel, as those dogs are doing."

"The honour of entertaining me!" he repeated, not grasping her meaning. "Entertaining me for what?"

"For dinner, sir. Mrs. Verrall has gone to London."

"No!" he exclaimed. He did not believe her.

Charlotte nodded. "She went at midday."

"But what took her away so suddenly?" exclaimed George, in surprise. "She had no intention yesterday of going."

"A freak. Or, impulse—if you like the word better. Kate rarely acts upon anything else. She has been expecting Verrall home these last three days; but he has neither come nor written: and this morning, after the post was in, she suddenly declared she'd go to town, and see what was keeping him."

"They may cross each other on the road."

"Of course they may: and Kate have her journey for her pains. That's nothing to her: she likes travelling. 'What am I to do with Mr. George Godolphin? Entertain him?' I said to her. 'I suppose you can

contrive to do it,' she answered. 'I suppose I could,' I said. 'But, what about its being proper?' I asked," added Charlotte, with a demure glance at George. "'Oh,' said Kate, 'it's proper enough, poor sick fellow: it would never do to disappoint him.' Therefore, sir, please take care that you behave properly, considering that a young lady is your hostess."

She threw a laughing glance at George; and, sitting down at the table, took a pack of beautifully painted cards from an ivory box, and began that delectable game that the French call "Patience." George watched her from the sofa where he was sitting. A certain thought had darted into his mind. What fit of prudence called it up? Did he think of Charlotte's good?—or of his own? Did the recollection of what Cecil had whispered actuate him? It cannot be told.' It was very far indeed from George Godolphin's intention to make a wife of Charlotte Pain, and he may have deemed it well to avoid all situations where he might compromise himself by a hasty word. Such words are more easily dropped than taken up again. Or perhaps George, free and careless though he was, reflected that it was not altogether the thing for Charlotte Pain to entertain him alone. With all his faults, George Godolphin was a gentleman: and Charlotte was not altogether fitted for a gentleman's wife.

"I am glad of it, Charlotte," he remarked. "I shall now have to make excuses to one only, instead of to two. I came to ask Mrs. Verrall to allow me to break through my engagement."

Charlotte had a knave in her hand, pondering where she could place it. She dropped it in her surprise.

"I must dine at home to-day, Charlotte. An old friend of my father and mother's, Mrs. Briscow, is arriving for dinner. I cannot be absent."

The flush deepened on Charlotte's face. "It is unkind of you!" she resentfully said. "But I knew before what your promises are worth."

"Unkind? But, Charlotte, I did not know until this morning that Mrs. Briscow was coming to-day. There's nothing unkind about it."

"It is unkind!" flashed Charlotte. "If you were not unkind, you would not leave me here alone, to pass a solitary evening and play at this wretched 'patience.'"

"But I am not going to leave you here. I wish to take you back with me to Ashlydyat to dinner. If you will put on your bonnet, we can be walking thither at once."

"You did not come intending to ask me."

"I did not. I did not know that Mrs. Verrall would be absent but I ask you now, being alone as you say. And I intend to take you."

"What will Miss Godolphin say?"

"Miss Godolphin will be very happy to see you." Which little assertion Mr. George knew to contain more politeness than truth. "Will you get ready, Charlotte? I must be returning."

Charlotte pushed the cards from her in a heap, and came and stood before George Godolphin, turning herself about for his inspection.

"Shall I do without further embellishment?" she asked.

"Admirably," was the gallant answer. "Why dress more for Ashlydyat than you would for home?"

Charlotte marched to the glass and surveyed herself. "Just something in my hair," she said, ringing the bell.

A maid came in by her desire, and fastened some blue and silver flowers in her hair. Charlotte Pain wore her hair capriciously: rarely two days alike. To-day it was all strained back from the face, that most trying of all styles, let the features be ever so pretty. A shawl was thrown over her shoulders, and then she turned to George.

"I am ready now."

"But your bonnet?" returned that gentleman, who had looked on with laughing eyes at the mysteries of the hair-dressing.

"I shall not put on a bonnet," she said. "They can bring it to me to Ashlydyat, for returning at night. People won't meet us: the road's not a public road. And if they should meet us," she added, laughing, "they will rejoice in the opportunity of seeing me abroad like this. It will be food for Prior's Ash."

So they started. Charlotte would not take his arm: she said he must take hers: he needed support and she did not. That, George would not agree to: and they strolled on, side by side, resting on benches occasionally. George found he had not much to boast of yet, in the way of strength.

"Who's this, coming up?" exclaimed Charlotte, when they had almost gained Ashlydyat, and were resting for the last time.

George followed the direction of her eyes. Advancing towards Ashlydyat was a lady, her grey silk dress gleaming in the sun, a light Cashmere shawl folded round her. There was no mistaking the ladylike figure of Mrs. Hastings.

"Is she to be one of your dinner-party?"

"Not that I am aware of."

Mrs. Hastings joined them. She sat down on a bench by George's side, affectionately inquiring into his state of health, speaking kindly and truthfully her pleasure at seeing him, so far, well again. Whatever prejudice may have been taken against George Godolphin by the Rector of All Souls', it did not extend to his wife. She liked him much.

"I am getting on famously," said George, in a merry tone. "I have promoted myself now to one stick: until yesterday I was forced to use two. You are going to Ashlydyat, Mrs. Hastings?"

"I wish to say a few words to Bessy. We have discovered something unpleasant relating to one of the schools, in which the undermistress is mixed up. A good deal of deceit has been going on, in fact. Mr. Hastings says Bessy ought to hear of it at once, for she was as much interested in it as we are. So I came up."

Mrs. Hastings, in speaking, had taken two or three glances at Charlotte's head. That young lady set herself to explain. Mr. George Godolphin had given her an impromptu invitation to go back with him to dine at Ashlydyat.

Then George explained. He had been engaged to dine at the Folly; but found, on arriving, that Mrs. Verrall had departed for London. "My friends are all kind to me, Mrs. Hastings," he observed. "They insist upon it that a change of a few hours must benefit me, and encumber themselves with the trouble of a fanciful invalid."

"I am sure there's nothing like change and amusement for one growing convalescent," said Charlotte.

"Will you let us contribute in some little way to it?" asked Mrs. Hastings of George. "If a few hours' sojourn in our quiet house would be agreeable to you, you know that we should only be too happy for you to try it."

"I should like it of all things," cried George, impulsively. "I cannot walk far yet without resting, and it is pleasant to sit a few hours at my walk's end, before I begin to start back again. I shall soon extend my journeys to Prior's Ash."

"Then come to us the first day that you feel able to get as far. You will always find some of us at home. We will dine at any hour you like, and you shall choose your own dinner."

"A bargain," said George.

They rose to pursue their way to Ashlydyat. Mrs. Hastings offered her arm to George, and he took it with thanks. "He would not take mine!" thought Charlotte, and she flashed an angry glance at him.

The fact was, that for some considerable time Charlotte Pain had put Maria Hastings almost out of her head, as regarded her relations to George Godolphin. Whatever reason she may have seen at Broomhead to believe he was attached to Maria, the impression had since faded away. In the spring, before his illness, George had been much more with her than with Maria. This was not entirely George's fault: the Rectory did not court him: Charlotte Pain and the Folly did. A week had now passed since Mr. Verrall's departure for town, when

George and his sticks appeared at the Folly for the first time after his illness; and, not a day of that week since but George and Charlotte had met. Altogether, her hopes of winning the prize had gone up to enthusiastic heat and Charlotte believed the greatest prize in the world—taking all his advantages collectively—to be George Godolphin. George went at once to his sister Janet's chamber. She was in it, dressing for dinner, after bringing her aged guest, Mrs. Briscow, from the station. He knocked at the door with his stick, and was told to enter.

Janet was before the glass in her black silk dress, trimmed heavily with crape still. She was putting on her sober cap, a white one, with black ribbons. Janet Godolphin had taken to wear caps at thirty years of age: her hair, like Thomas's, was thin; and she was not troubled with cares of making herself appear younger than she was.

"Come in, George," she said, turning to him without any appearance of surprise.

"See how good I am, Janet!" he cried, throwing himself wearily into a chair. "I have come back to dine with you."

"I saw you from the window. You have been walking too far!"

"Only to the Folly and back. But I sauntered about, looking at the flowers, and that tires one far worse than bearing on steadily."

"Ay. Lay yourself down on that couch at full length, lad. Mrs. Hastings is here, I see. And—was that other Charlotte Pain?"

"Yes," replied George, disregarding the injunction to lie down.

"Did she come from the Folly in that guise?—Nothing on her head but those flowers? I could see no bonnet even in her hand."

"It is to be sent after her. Janet"—passing quickly from the other matter—"she has come to dine with us."

Miss Godolphin turned in amazement, and fixed her eyes reproachfully on George. "To dine with us?—to-day? Have you been asking her?"

"Janet, I could not well help myself. When I got to Lady Godolphin's Folly, I found Charlotte alone: Mrs. Verrall has departed for town. To break through my engagement there, I proposed that Charlotte should come here."

"Nay," said Janet, "your engagement was already broken, if Mrs. Verrall was away."

"Not so. Charlotte expected me to remain."

"Herself your sole entertainer?"

"I suppose so."

A severe expression arose to Miss Godolphin's lips, and remained there. "It is most unsuitable, Charlotte Pain's being here to-day," she resumed. "The changes which have taken place render our meeting with Mrs. Briscow a sad one; no stranger ought to be at table. Least of all, Charlotte Pain. Her conversation is at times unfeminine."

"How can you say so, Janet?" he involuntarily exclaimed.

"Should she launch into some of her favourite topics, her horses and her dogs, it will sound unfeminine to Mrs. Briscow's ears. In her young days—in my days also, George, for the matter of that—these subjects were deemed more suitable to men's lips than to young women's. George, had your mother lived, it would have been a sore day to her, the one that brought the news that you had fixed your mind on Charlotte Pain."

"It was not so to my father, at any rate," George could not help saying.

"And was it possible that you did not see how Charlotte Pain played her cards before your father?" resumed Janet. "Not a word, that could offend his prejudices as a refined gentleman, did she ever suffer herself to utter. I saw; if you did not."

"You manage to see a great deal that the rest of us don't see, Janet. Or you fancy that you do."

"It is no fancy, lad. I would not like to discourage a thing that you have set your heart upon; I would rather go a mile out of my way than do it: but I stand next door to a mother to you, and I can but warn you that you will repent it, if you ever suffer Charlotte Pain to be more to you than she now is."

George rose. "Set your mind at rest, Janet. It has never been my intention to marry Charlotte Pain: and—so far as I believe at present—it never will be."

The dinner went off pleasantly. Mrs. Briscow was a charming old lady, although she was of the "antediluvian" school, and Charlotte was on her best behaviour, and half fascinated Mrs. Briscow. George, like a trespassing child, received several hints from Janet that bed might be desirable for him, but he ingeniously ignored them, and sat on. Charlotte's bonnet and an attendant arrived, and Thomas Godolphin put on his hat to see her to the Folly.

"I need not trouble you, Mr. Godolphin. I shall not be run away with."

"I think it will be as well that I should see you do not," said he, smiling.

It was scarcely dark. The clock had not struck ten, and the night was starlight. Thomas Godolphin gave her his arm, and the maid walked behind them. Arrived at Ashlydyat, he left her. Charlotte stood for a few moments, then turned on her heel and entered the hall. The first thing that caught her notice was a hat; next a travelling coat. They had not been there when she left in the afternoon.

"Then Verrall's back I" she mentally exclaimed.

Hastening into the dining-room, she saw, seated at a table, drinking brandy and water, not Mr. Verrall, but Rodolf Pain.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Charlotte, with more surprise in her tone than satisfaction, "have you come?"

"Come to find an empty house," rejoined Mr. Pain. "Where's Mrs. Verrall? They tell me she is gone to London."

"She is," replied Charlotte. "Verrall neither came back nor wrote; she had a restless fit upon her, and started off this morning to him."

"Verrall won't thank her," observed Mr. Pain. "He is up to his eyes in business."

"Good or bad business?" asked Charlotte.

"Both. We have got into a mess, and Verrall's not yet out of it."

"Through what? Through whom?" she questioned.

Rodolf Pain gave his shoulders a jerk, as if he had been a Frenchman., "It need not trouble you, Charlotte."

"Some one came down here from London a week ago; a Mr. Appleby. Is it through him? Verrall seemed strangely put out at his coming."

Mr. Pain nodded his head. "They were such idiots in the office as to give Appleby the address here. I have seen Verrall in a tolerable passion once or twice in my life, but I never saw him in such a one as he went into when he came up. They'll not forget it in a hurry. He lays the blame on me, remotely; says I must have left a letter about with the address on it. I know I have done nothing of the sort."

"But what is it, Rodolf? Anything very bad?"

"Bad enough. But it can be remedied. Let Verrall alone for getting out of pits, however deep they may be. I wish, though, we had never set eyes on that fellow, Appleby!"

"Tell me about it, Rodolf."

Mr. Rodolf declined. "You could do no good," said he, "and business is not fitted for ladies' ears."

"I don't care to know it," said Charlotte. "It's no concern of mine: but, somehow, that man Appleby interested me. As to business not being fitted for my ears, I should make a better hand at business than some of you men make."

"Upon my word, I think you would, Charlotte. I have often said it. But you are one in a thousand."

"Have you had anything to eat since you came in?"

"They brought me some supper. It has just gone away."

"I had better inquire whether there's a room ready for you?" she remarked, moving towards the bell.

"It's all done, Charlotte. I told them I had come to stay. Just sit down, and let me talk to you."

"Shall you stay long?"

"I can't tell until I hear from Verrall to-morrow. I may be leaving again to-morrow night, or I may be here for interminable weeks. The office is to be clear of Mr. Verrall just now, do you understand?"

Charlotte apparently did understand. She took her seat in a chair listlessly enough. Something in her manner would have told an accurate observer that she could very well have dispensed with the company of Rodolf Pain. He, however, saw nothing of that. He took his cigar-case from his pocket, selected a cigar, and then, by way of sport, held the case out to Charlotte.

"Will you take one?"

For answer, she dashed it out of his hand half way across the room. And she did it in anger, too.

"How uncertain you, are!" he exclaimed, as he rose to pick up his property. "There are times when you can take a joke pleasantly, and laugh at it."

He sat down again, lighted his cigar, and smoked a few minutes in silence. Then he turned to her. "Don't you think it is time, Charlotte, that you and I brought ourselves to an anchor?"

"No, I don't," she bluntly answered.

"But I say it is," he resumed. "And I mean it to be done."

"You mean!"

Something in the tone roused him, and he gazed at her with surprise. "You are not going from your promise, Charlotte?"

"I don't remember that I made any distinct promise," said she.

Mr. Rodolf Pain grew heated. "You know that you did, Charlotte. You know that you engaged yourself irrevocably to me—"

"Irrevocably!" she slightly-interrupted. "How you misapply words!"

"It was as irrevocable as promise can be. Have you not led me on, this twelvemonth past, believing month after month that you would be my wife the next? And, month after month, you have put me off upon the most frivolous pretexts!"

He rose as he spoke, drew up his little figure to its utmost height in his excitement, and pushed back his light hair from his small, insignificant face. A face that betrayed not too much strength of any sort, physical, moral, or intellectual; but a good-natured face withal. Charlotte retained unbroken calmness.

"Rodolf, I don't think it would do," she said, with an air of candid reasoning. "I have thought it over and over, and that's why I have put you off. It is not well that we should all be so closely connected together. Better get new ties, that will shelter us, in case ht?" asked Rudolf Pain, his eyes strained on Charlotte through their very light lashes.

"In case a smash comes. That—if we are all in the same boat—would ruin the lot. Better that you and I should form other connections.

"You are talking great nonsense," he angrily said. "A smash!—to us! Can't you trust Verrall better than that?"

"Why, you say that, even at this present moment—"

"You are wrong, Charlotte," he vehemently interrupted; "you entirely misunderstand me. Things go wrong in business temporarily; they must do so in business of all sorts; but they right themselves again. Why! do you know what Verrall made last year?"

"A great deal."

"My little petty share was two thousand pounds: and that is as a drop of water to the ocean compared with his. What has put you upon these foolish fancies?"

"Prudence," returned Charlotte.

"I don't believe it," was the plain answer. "You are trying to blind me. You are laying yourself out for higher game; and to shut my eyes, and gain time to see if you can play it out, you concoct a story of 'prudence' to me. It's one or the other of those Godolphins."

"The Godolphins!" mockingly repeated Charlotte. "You are clever! The one will never marry as long as the world lasts; the other's dead."

"Dead!" echoed Rodolf Pain.

"As good as dead. He's like a ghost, and he is being sent off for an everlasting period to some warmer climate. How ridiculous you are, Rodolf!"

"Charlotte, I'll take care of ways and means. I'll take care of you and your interests. Only fix the time when you will be mine."

"Then I won't, Rodolf. I don't care to marry yet awhile. I'll see about it when the next hunting season shall be over."

Rodolf Pain opened his eyes. "The hunting season!" he cried.

"What has that to do with it?"

"Were you my husband, you would be forbidding me to hunt; you don't like my doing it now. So for the present I'll remain mistress of my own actions."

"Another lame excuse," he said, knitting his brow. "You will take very good care always to remain mistress of your own actions, whether married or single."

Charlotte laughed, a ringing laugh of power. It spoke significantly enough to Mr. Rodolf Pam. He would have renewed the discussion, but she peremptorily declined, and shaking hands with him, wished him good night.

Part 1. Chapter 20.

A REVELATION TO ALL SOULS' RECTOR.

George Godolphin was not long at availing himself of the invitation to All Souls' Rectory. The very day after it was given, he was on his way to it. He started with his stick: made one halt at a shop on his road, and arrived about twelve o'clock.

Not a soul was at home but Maria. Mrs. Hastings, who had not expected him for some days; for she did not suppose his strength would allow him to get so far yet, had gone out with Grace. Mr. Hastings was in the church, and Maria was alone.

She sat in that one pleasant room of the house, the long room looking to the lawn and the flower-beds. She looked so pretty, so refined, so quiet in her simple dress of white muslin, as she pursued her employment, that of drawing, never suspecting how she was going to be interrupted.

The door of the porch stood open, as it often did in summer, and George Godolphin entered without the ceremony of knocking. The hail was well matted, and Maria did not hear him cross it. A slight tap at the room door.

"Come in," said Maria, supposing it to be one of the servants.

He came in and stood in the doorway, smiling down upon her. So shadowy, so thin! his face utterly pale, his dark blue eyes unnaturally large, his wavy hair damp with the exertion of walking. Maria's heart stood still. She rose from her seat, unable to speak, the colour going and coming in her transparent skin; and when she quietly moved forward to welcome him, her heart found its action again, and bounded on in tumultuous beats. The very intensity of her emotion caused her demeanour to be almost unnaturally still.

"Are you glad to see me, Maria?"

It was the first time they had met since his illness; the first time for more than four months. All that time separated; all that time fearing he was about to be removed by death! As he approached Maria, her

emotion broke forth—she burst into tears; and surely it may be excused her.

He was scarcely less agitated. He clasped her tenderly to him, and kissed the tears from her face, his own eyelashes glistening. There was no great harm in it after all; for that each looked forward to the hope of being bound together at no great distance of time by nearer and dearer ties, was indisputable. At least no harm would have come of it, if— Look at the window.

They did. And there they saw the awful face of the Rector glaring in upon them, and by its side, the more awful of the two, that of Charlotte Pain.

Why had she followed George Godolphin to the Rectory? Was she determined not to allow him a single chance of escaping her? She, bearing in remembrance the compact with Mrs. Hastings, had watched George Godolphin's movements that morning from the windows of the Folly; had watched the by-road leading to the Rectory. She saw George and his stick go tottering down it: and by-and-by she put on her things and went out too, imperatively declining the escort of Mr. Rodolf Pain.

Her intention was to make a call at the Rectory—all unconscious of course that she should find Mr. George Godolphin there. By dint of a little by-play with Mrs. Hastings—who was too thoroughly a lady to be given to suspicion— she might receive an invitation to remain also for the day. With these very laudable intentions Charlotte arrived opposite All Souls' Church, where she caught sight of the Reverend Mr. Hastings emerging from the door. She crossed the churchyard, and accosted him.

"Is Mrs. Hastings at home, do you know? I am going to call upon her?"

Now Charlotte was no great favourite of that gentleman's: nevertheless, being a gentleman, he answered her courteously as he shook hands. He believed Mrs. Hastings and Grace were out, he said, but Maria was at home.

"I am moped to death!" exclaimed Charlotte, as she and Mr. Hastings entered the private gate to the Rectory garden. "Mrs.

Verrall is gone to London, and there am I! I came out intending to go the round of the town until I could find some good Samaritan or other who Would take compassion on me, and let me stay an hour or two with them."

Mr. Hastings gave no particular reply. He did not make for the side door of the house, his usual entrance from the church, but turned towards the front, that he might usher in Charlotte in state. This took them by the windows of the drawing-room: and there they saw what has been recorded. Mr. Hastings, in his astonishment, halted: Charlotte halted also, as you may be very sure.

George was the first to see them, and a word of anger broke from his lips. Maria hastily raised her head from its resting-place—and felt almost as if she should die. To be seen thus by Charlotte Pain was bad enough: but by her strict father! Her face grew white.

George Godolphin saw the signs. "My darling, only be calm! Leave all to me."

That an explanation was forced upon him somewhat prematurely, was undoubted. But it was no unwelcome explanation. Nay, in the second moment, he was deeming it the very best thing that could have happened: for certain visions of taking Maria with him into exile had crossed his brain lately. He would try hard now to get them realized. It is true he would have preferred, all things considered, not to speak before Miss Charlotte Pain: but necessity, as you know, has no law.

The Rector came in at the door: Charlotte following. "Mr. George Godolphin!" he frigidly began; but George interrupted what he would have further said.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, taking a step forward; "allow me one word of explanation before you cast blame on me. I was asking your daughter to be my wife. Will you give her to me?"

Mr. Hastings looked as a man confounded. That he was intensely surprised at the words was evident: perhaps he half doubted whether Mr. George Godolphin was playing with him. He cast a severe glance at Maria. George had taken her on his arm, and she stood there shrinking, her head drooping, her eyelashes resting on

her white cheek. As for Charlotte Pain? well, you should have seen her.

Ah no, there was no deception. George was in true earnest, and Mr. Hastings saw that he was. His eyes were fixed beseechingly on those of Mr. Hastings, and emotion had brought the hectic to his wasted cheek.

"Do not blame Maria, sir," he resumed. "She is innocent of all offence, and dutiful as innocent. Were you to interpose your veto between us, and deny her to me, I know that she would obey you, even though the struggle killed her. Mr. Hastings, we have loved each other for some time past: and I should have spoken to you before, but for my illness intervening. Will you give her to me at once, and let her share my exile!

Mr. Hastings had no insuperable objection to George Godolphin. That report had given Mr. George credit for bushels and bushels of wild oats, which he would have to sow, was certain: but in this respect he was no worse than many others, and marriage is supposed to be a cure for youthful follies. Mr. Hastings had once suspected that Maria was acquiring more liking for George than was good for her: hence his repulsion of George, for he believed that he was destined for Charlotte Pain. Even now he could not comprehend how it was, and the prominent feeling in his mind was surprised perplexity.

"I love her as my own life, sir. I will strive to render her happy."

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Hastings, dropping his tone of anger. "I was under the impression—I beg your pardon, Miss Pain," turning to her, "but I was under the impression that you were engaged to Mr. George Godolphin!"

If ever Charlotte Pain had need to fight for composure, she had dire need then. Her hopes were suddenly hurled to the ground, and she had the cruel mortification of hearing him, whom she best loved, reject and spurn her for a long-hated rival. If her love for George Godolphin was not very deep or refined—and it was neither the one nor the other—she did love him after a fashion; better, at any rate, than she loved any one else. The position she would take as George Godolphin's wife was hurled from her; and perhaps Miss Charlotte

cared for that more than she did for George himself. The Verralls and their appearance of wealth were all very well in their places—as George had said by the dogs—but what were they, compared with the ancient Godolphins? There are moments which drive a woman to the verge of madness, and Charlotte was so driven now. Anything like control of temper was quite beyond her: and malevolence entered her heart.

"I engaged to Mr. George Godolphin!" she echoed, taking up the Rector's words in a shrieking tone, which she could not have helped had her life depended on it. "Engaged to a married man? Thank you, Mr. Hastings."

"A married man!" repeated the puzzled Rector. Whilst George turned his questioning eyes upon her.

"Yes, a married man," she continued, her throat working, her breath panting. "They may have chosen to hoodwink you, to blind you, Mr. Hastings, but I saw what I saw. When your daughter—innocent Miss Maria there—came home from Scotland, she had been married to George Godolphin. A false priest, a sort of Gretna Green man, had married them: and I saw it done. I engaged to George Godolphin!"

Charlotte Pain knew that the words were false: called up to gratify her rage in that angry moment. Scarcely anything else that she could conjure up would so have told upon the Rector. In his straightforward right-doing, to his practical mind, a clandestine marriage appeared one of the cardinal sins. His face turned pale, and his eye flashed as he grasped Maria's shoulder.

"Girl! is this so?"

"Oh, papa, no!" returned Maria, with streaming eyes. "It is a wicked untruth. Charlotte! to tell such an untruth is wicked. Papa, I affirm to you—"

"Hush, Maria," interposed George, "let me deal with this. Mr. Hastings, it is a thing that you need scarcely ask of your daughter—whether, it is true, or untrue. Is she one, think you, to enter into a clandestine marriage? You know better, sir. Nothing has ever passed between myself and Maria more than has passed before you this day. Were I thoughtless enough to solicit her to enter into one—and

you need not think of me a whit better than you choose—Maria would only repulse me. Miss Pain, will you unsay your words?"

For answer, Miss Pain entered into a scornful account of Sandy Bray and his doings. She reiterated her assertion. She declared that she saw Maria and George standing before him, their hands clasped together in the attitude of a couple being married, when she entered suddenly with a message from Lady Godolphin, and she finished up by saying she had always believed since that they were married, only it had been no business of hers to proclaim it. The Rector's brow grew moist again, and George Godolphin looked significantly at Charlotte. He spoke significantly, too.

"No, you have not thought it, Charlotte." And he turned and related to Mr. Hastings as much as he knew of Sandy Bray, emphatically repeating his denial. "If you will take a moment's thought, sir, you may be convinced that the truth lies with me. I am beseeching you to give Maria to me; I crave it of you as the greatest boon that I can ask in life. I know not whether you will yield to my petition: but, what argument could I urge, to induce it, with half the force of the one that she was already secretly my wife? Nay, were she indeed so, why should I care for the ceremony to be repeated? I should only have to confess it, and throw myself and my wife upon your forgiveness. I heartily wish it had been so!

"You are bold, Mr. George Godolphin!"

"Bold, sir?" returned George, with emotion. "Not more bold than I ought to be. I don't care to defend myself, but I do care to defend Maria. Give her to me, Mr. Hastings! give her to me!" he added, changing his tone to one of tender entreaty. "I will defend her through life with my best blood."

Mr. Hastings looked at him; looked at the tearful, but certainly not guilty countenance of his daughter; turned and looked at the furious one of Charlotte Pain. "Step this way," he said to George Godolphin. "I would speak to you alone."

He took him to another room, and shut the door. "I want the truth," he said, "upon one or two points—"

"Mr. Hastings," said George, drawing himself up, "I have told you nothing but the truth upon all points."

"Were you never engaged to Charlotte Pain?" proceeded Mr. Hastings, taking no notice of the interruption.

"Never. I never sought or wished to be."

"Then what did your good father, Sir George, mean, when he alluded to it the night he was dying? He asked if you and Charlotte were married yet, and you replied, 'Plenty of time for that.'"

"I said it merely in answer to his words: it was not an hour for dissent or explanation. He was not conscious of what he said."

"Had you expressed to him any particular liking for Charlotte Pain?"

"I had not; at any time. Sir George believed Miss Pain had a large fortune, and he recommended me, more than once, to think of her, and it. He said she was a handsome girl, and none the worse for possessing a fortune. He had heard she would have thirty thousand pounds. I used to laugh it off. I cared for Maria too much to cast a thought to Charlotte Pain. That is the whole truth, Mr. Hastings, on my honour."

"Would he have objected to Maria?"

"To Maria I am certain he would not have objected. To her want of fortune he might. But that is a thing that only concerns myself. I do not require fortune with my wife, and I do not seek it. You will give her to me, Mr. Hastings? You will dispense with unnecessary ceremony, and let her go abroad with me?" he urged. "She will do me more good than all else."

"I will give you no promise of any sort, Mr. George Godolphin. As to taking her abroad with you, it is absurd to think of it. And no daughter of mine shall enter a family where she is not sure of a hearty welcome. I must first know the sentiments of yours."

George looked radiant. "Mr. Hastings, if they heartily welcome Maria, will you allow me to welcome her?"

"Possibly I may."

"Then it is an affair decided. Janet will be relieved of a nightmare; and Maria is, I believe, Thomas's prime favourite in all the world, now that Ethel is gone."

"Of what nightmare will it relieve Miss Godolphin?" inquired the Rector.

A smile crossed George's lips. "She, like you, has been fearing that I intended to connect myself with Charlotte Pain. Only yesterday I assured Janet that she was mistaken; not I scarcely think she placed entire faith in me. She does not like Miss Pain."

"Do you think you have pursued a wise course in giving cause for this talk, regarding Miss Pain?"

"I have not given cause to Miss Pain herself, Mr. Hastings," replied George, warmly. "I am convinced that she has known in her heart of my attachment to Maria. As to whiling away a few hours with her occasionally in idle talk, it is a pastime that Charlotte Pain is given to."

"And myself also," Mr. George might have added.

They left the room together. A servant came up to Mr. Hastings as he was crossing the hall, and said an applicant at the door craved speech of him. The Rector turned to it, and George entered the drawing-room alone.

Maria stood, pale, anxious, excited, leaning against a corner of the window, half shrouded by the muslin curtains. She scarcely dared look up when George entered. It was not his gaze that she dreaded to meet but that of Mr. Hastings. To anger or displease her father was wormwood to Maria.

George cast a glance round the room. "Where's Charlotte Pain?" he asked.

"She is gone," was Maria's answer. "Oh, George!" clasping her hands, and lifting to him her streaming eyes: "it was cruel of her to say what she did!"

I could give it a better name than that, Maria. Never mind: we can afford to be generous to-day."

"Is papa fully convinced that—that I do not deserve blame?"

"He was convinced of that before he left this room. You are to be mine, Maria," he softly added in a whisper. "And very shortly. I must take you abroad with me."

'She stood before him, not daring to look up now: shrinking from his ardent gaze, the crimson mantling to her pure cheek.

"Mr. Hastings demurs at the haste; calls it absurd," continued George; "but, if you will consent to waive ceremony, surely he may do so. 'Which would be more absurd, Maria? your marrying without the three months' preparation for millinery deemed necessary by fashion, or my going away alone for an indefinite period, perhaps to die."

"Not to die, George!" she involuntarily answered in a tone painfully beseeching—as if he held the fiat of life or death in his own hands.

"But—about the haste—I don't know— I heard you thought of departing soon?"

"I ought to be away in a fortnight's time."

That startled her. "A fortnight's time!" she echoed, in a voice of alarm. "Then it could not be. What would Priors Ash say?"

"Maria," he gravely answered, "some nine months ago, when Sarah Anne Grame was seized with fever, my brother, alarmed for Ethel's safety, would have married her hastily, so that he might have the right to remove her from danger. Ethel's answer to him was, 'What would Prior's Ash say?'—as you have now answered me. Thomas bowed to it: he suffered the world's notions to reign paramount—and he lost Ethel. What value do you suppose he sets now upon the opinions of Ash? The cases may not be precisely parallel, but they are sufficiently so to decide me. If I go away from home, I take you: if I may not take you, I do not go. And now, my darling, I will say farewell to you for the present."

She was surprised. She thought he had come to stay for some hours.

"Yes," he replied; "but affairs have changed since I entered. Until they shall be more definitively settled, Mr. Hastings will not care that I remain his guest."

He bent to kiss her. Not in the stolen manner he had been accustomed to, but—quietly, gravely, turning her shy face to his, as if it were his legal province so to do. "A little while, young lady," he saucily whispered, "and you will be giving me kiss for kiss."

Mr. Hastings was in the porch still, holding a colloquy with ill-doing and troublesome Mrs. Bond. George held out his hand as he passed.

"You have not rested yourself," said the Rector.

"I shall get back as far as the bank and rest there," replied George. "I presume, sir, that you intend to see my brother?"

"And also Miss Godolphin," curtly said the Rector.

His eyes followed George down the path to the gate, as he and his stick moved unsteadily along. "Marry now " mentally cried Mr. Hastings, his brow contracting: "he looks more fit to take to his bed, and keep it. Now, Mrs. Bond," he added aloud, "let me hear the conclusion of this fine tale."

George took his way to the bank. He had not passed it in coming; having cut across from Ashlydyat by the nearer way at the back of the town. He took them by surprise. Mr. Crosse was out, but the clerks were warm in their congratulations; they had not believed him yet equal to the exertion.

"You look very tired," said Thomas, when they were alone in the bank parlour.

"I feel fagged to death," was George's answer. "I must get you to send out for a fly for me, and go home in that. Thomas," he continued, plunging into his business abruptly, "I expect you will have an application made to you, regarding me."

"In what way?" quietly asked Thomas.

"Well—it is not exactly a certificate of character that's required," returned George, with a smile. "I—I am thinking of getting married. Will you approve of it?"

"I have no right to disapprove," said Thomas, in a kind, grave tone. "You are your own master; free to act as you shall judge best. I only hope, George, that you will, in choosing, consider your future happiness.

"Has it never occurred to you that I have chosen?"

"I used to think at times that you had chosen, or felt inclined to choose, Maria Hastings."

"Right," said George. "I have been speaking to Mr. Hastings and it appears to have taken him entirely by surprise. He would give rue no answer until he should have ascertained whether the alliance would be agreeable to you and Janet. He is a man of crotchets, you know. So I expect he will be coming to you, Thomas."

Thomas Godolphin's eyes lighted up with pleasure. "He shall receive my hearty approval," he said, warmly. "George"—changing his tone to sadness—"in the days gone by I thought there were two young beings superior to the rest of the world: Ethel and Maria."

"I said so to Mr. Hastings. I conclude he fears that Maria's want of fortune would render her unpalatable to my family," remarked George.

"Certainly not to me. Ethel, whom I chose, had even less. If you think well to dispense with fortune in your wife, George, we have no right to object to it. I am glad that you have chosen Maria Hastings."

But there was Janet yet to come. George went home in a fly, arid threw himself on the first sofa he could find. Janet, full of concern, came to him.

"I said you were attempting too much, George!" she cried. "But you never will listen to me."

"I'm sure, Janet, I listen to you dutifully. I have come home to consult you now," he added, a little spirit of mischief dancing in his gay blue eyes. "It is not fatigue or illness that has brought me. Janet, I am going to be married."

Janet Godolphin's pulses beat more quickly. She sat down and folded her hands with a gesture of pain. "I knew it would be so. You need not have tried to deceive me yesterday, lad."

"But the young lady's friends refuse her to me, unless my family openly sanction and approve of the match," went on George. "You'll be kindly over it, won't you, Janet?"

"No, lad. I cannot forbid it; I have no authority over you: but, sanction it, I never will. What has put it into your head to marry in this haste? You, with one foot in the grave, as may be said, and one out of it?"

"Well, you see, Janet, you won't trust me abroad without some one to look after me," he slowly answered, as if he were arguing some momentous question. "You say you can't go, and Bessy can't go, and Cecil may not, and I say I won't have Margery. What was I to do, but marry? I cannot take a young lady, you know, without first marrying her."

Janet Godolphin's grave eyes were fixed on vacancy, and her thin lips drawn in to pressure. She did not answer.

"Thomas heartily approves," he continued. "I have been with him."

"Thomas must do as he likes," said Janet. "But, unless you have unwittingly misunderstood him, George, you are telling me a deliberate falsehood. He will never approve of your marrying Charlotte Pain."

"Charlotte Pain!" repeated George, with an air of as much surprise as if it were genuine, "who was talking about Charlotte Pain? What put her into your head?"

Janet's face flushed. "Were you not talking of Charlotte Pain?"

"Not I," said George. "In spite of the compliments you pay my truthfulness, Janet, I meant what I said to you yesterday—that I did not intend to make her my wife. I am speaking of Maria Hastings."

"Eh, lad, but that's good news!"

George burst into a laugh. "What green geese you must all have been, Janet! Had you used your eyes, you might have detected this long time past that my choice was fixed on Maria. But the Rector doubts whether you will approve. He will not promise her to me until he has your sanction."

"I'll put my shawl on and go down at once to the Rectory and tell him that we all love Maria," said Janet, more impulsively than was common with her: but in truth she had been relieved from a great fear. There was something about Charlotte Pain that frightened sedate Janet. Compared with her, Maria Hastings appeared everything that was desirable as a wife for George. Her want of fortune, her want of position—which was certainly not equal to that of the Godolphins—were lost sight of.

"I could manage to take some broth, Janet," cried George, as she was leaving the room. "I have had nothing since breakfast."

"To be sure. I am growing forgetful. Margery shall wait upon you, my dear. But, to go down to the Rectory without delay, is a courtesy due from me."

So, no impediment was placed upon the marriage. Neither was any impediment placed upon its immediate celebration: the Rector permitting himself to be persuaded into it.

Part 1. Chapter 21.

CHARLOTTE'S BARGAIN.

Three weeks after that momentous day at All Souls' Rectory, George Godolphin and Maria stood before the Rector in All Souls' Church. George did not appear very ill now; he was not so shadowy, his fine complexion had returned, and stick the second was discarded. Maria was beautiful. Her soft bridal robes floated around her, her colour went and came as she glanced shyly up at George Godolphin. A handsome couple; a couple seldom seen.

It was quite a private marriage so to say; but few guests being present, and they relatives, or very close friends. Lady Godolphin had responded to the invitation (which Janet had not expected her to do), and was the guest of Ashlydyat. Very superb was she in silks and jewels this day. Old Mrs. Briscow had also remained for it. Mr. Crosse was present, and some relatives of the Hastings family; and Grace and Cecil were bridesmaids. The Rector joined their hands, speaking the necessary words slowly and emphatically; words that bound them to each other until death.

Then came the breakfast at the Rectory, and then the going away. The carriage waited at the gate. The Rector laid his hand upon George Godolphin's arm as he was going out to it, and addressed him in a low tone.

"I have confided her to you in entire trust. You will cherish her in all love and honour?"

"Always!" emphatically pronounced George, grasping the Rector's hand. "You shall never have cause to repent the gift."

Thomas Godolphin was placing Maria in the carriage. She looked out through her tears, nodding her last adieus. George took his place beside her, and the postboy started on the first stage towards Dover.

As they were passing the house of Lady Sarah Grame, by which their route lay, that lady herself sat at the window, as did also Sarah Anne; both on the tiptoe of curiosity, beyond all doubt. Between

them, laughing and talking with a gay air, and looking out, stood Charlotte Pain. Maria gave vent to an involuntary exclamation.

Another moment, and they had whirled by, beyond view. George turned impulsively to Maria and drew her closer to him. "Thank God! thank God!" he earnestly said.

"For what?" she murmured.

"That you are mine. Maria, I dreamt last night that I had married Charlotte Pain, and that you were dying. The dream has been haunting me all day. I can laugh at it now, thank God!"

In the gayest and lightest room of Lady Godolphin's Folly, its widows open to the green slopes, the gay flowers, the magnificent aspect which swept the horizon in the distance, was Mrs. Verrall. She lay back in a fauteuil, in the vain, idle, listless manner favoured by her; toying with the ribbons of her tasty dress, with the cluster of gleaming trifles on her watch-chain, with her gossamer handkerchief, its lace so fine in texture that unobservant eyes could not tell where the cambric ended and the lace began, with her fan which lay beside her, tapping her pretty foot upon an ottoman in some impatience; there she sat, displaying her conscious charms, and waiting for any callers as idle and vain as herself, who might arrive to admire them.

At a distance, in another fauteuil, listless and impatient also, sat Rodolf Pain. Time hung heavily on Mr. Pain's hands just now. He was kept a sort of prisoner at Lady Godolphin's Folly, and it appeared to be the chief business of Charlotte Pain's life to be cross to him. Three weeks had his sojourn there lasted: and though he had hinted to Charlotte on his arrival that he might remain a goodly number of weeks—interminable weeks, was the expression, I think—he had not really expected to do so; and the delay was chafing him. What particular business might be keeping Mr. Pain at Prior's Ash it is not our province at present to inquire: what his especial motive might be for rather shunning observation than courting it, is no affair of ours. He did not join Mrs. Verrall in her visiting: he had an innate dislike to visitors—to "fine people," as he phrased it. Even now, if any carriage drove up and deposited its freight at the Folly, it would be the signal for Mr. Rodolf Pain to walk out of the drawing-room. He was shy, and had not been

accustomed to society. He strolled in and out all day in his restlessness, nearly unnoticed by Mrs. Verrall, fidgeting Charlotte Pain; a cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets; sauntering about the grounds, flinging himself into chairs, one sentence of complaint for ever on his lips: "I wish to goodness Verrall would write!"

But Verrall did not write. Mrs. Verrall had received one or two short notes from him after her return from London—where she had stayed but twenty-four hours—and all the allusion in them to Mr. Pain had been "Tell Rodolf he shall hear from me as soon as possible." Rodolf could only wait with what patience he might, and feel himself like a caged tiger, without its fierceness. There was no fierceness about Rodolf Pain—timidity rather than that.

A timidity for which Charlotte despised him. Had he been more bold and self-asserting, she might have accorded him greater respect. What could have possessed Charlotte ever to engage herself to Rodolf Pain, would be a mystery for curious minds to solve, only that such mysteries are enacted every day. Engagements and marriages apparently the most incongruous take place. This much may be said for Charlotte: that let her enter into what engagement she might, she would keep it or break it, just as whim or convenience suited her Rodolf Pain's thoughts, as he sat in that chair, were probably turned to this very fact, for he broke the silence suddenly by a pertinent question to Mrs. Verrall.

"Does she never mean to marry?"

"Who?" languidly asked Mrs. Verrall.

"Charlotte, of course. I have nothing to do with anybody else, that I should ask. She faithfully promised to be my wife: you know she did, Mrs. Verrall—"

"Don't talk to me, Rodolf," apathetically interrupted Mrs. Verrall. "As if I should interfere between you and Charlotte!"

"I think you are in league together to snub me, Mrs. Verrall, she and you; that's what I think," grumbled Rodolf. "If I only remind her of her promise, she snaps my nose off. Are we to be married, or are we not?"

"It is no affair of mine, I say," said Mrs. Verrall, "and I shall not make it one. I had as soon Charlotte married you, as not; but I am not going to take an active part in urging it—probably only to be blamed afterwards. This is all I can say, and if you tease me more, Rodolf, I shall trouble you to walk into another room."

Thus repulsed, Rodolf Pain held his tongue. He turned about in his chair, stretched out his feet, drew them in again, threw up his arms with a prolonged yawn, and altogether proved that he was going wild for want of something to do. Presently he began again.

"Where's she off to?"

"Charlotte?" cried Mrs. Verrall. "She went into Prior's Ash. She said—yes, I think she said, she should call upon Lady Sarah Grame. Look there!"

Mrs. Verrall rose from her seat, and ran to a farther window, whence she gained a better view of the high-road, leading from Ashlydyat to Prior's Ash. A chariot-and-four was passing slowly towards the town. Its postboys wore white favours, and Margery and a manservant were perched outside. Mrs. Verrall knew that it was the carriage destined to convey away George Godolphin and his bride, who were at that moment seated at the breakfast at All Souls' Rectory, chief amidst the wedding guests.

"Then Margery does go abroad with them!" exclaimed Mrs. Verrall. "The servants had so many conflicting tales, that it was impossible to know which to believe. She goes as Mrs. George's maid, I suppose, and to see after him and his rheumatism."

"His rheumatism's well, isn't it?" returned Rodolf Pain.

"That is well; but he's not. He is weak as water, needing care still. Prudent Janet does well to send Margery. What should Maria Hastings know about taking care of the sick? I think they have shown excessively bad manners not to invite me to the breakfast," continued Mrs. Verrall, in a tone of acidity.

"Some one said it was to be quite a private breakfast: confined to relatives."

"I don't care," said Mrs. Verrall; "they might have made an exception in my favour. They know I like such things: and we lived in their house, Ashlydyat, and are now living at Lady Godolphin's Folly

"That's where Charlotte's gone, I'll lay," cried Mr. Rodolf Pain.

Mrs. Verrall turned her eyes upon him with a slight accession of wonder in them. "Gone there! To the Rectory? Nonsense, Rodolf!"

"I didn't say to the Rectory, Mrs. Verrall. She wouldn't be so stupid as to go there without an invitation. She's gone about the town, to stare at the carriages, and look out for what she can see."

"Very possibly," returned Mrs. Verrall, throwing herself into her chair in weariness. "What has become of all the people to-day, that no one comes to call upon me? I should think they are stopping to look at the wedding."

Rodolf, in weariness as great, slowly lifted his body out of the chair, gave himself another stretch, and left the room. The curse of work! Never did work bring a curse half as great as that brought by idleness. Better break stones on the road, better work in galley-chains, than sit through the livelong day, day after day as the year goes round, and be eaten up by lassitude. Rodolf Pain's compulsory idleness was only temporary; he was away from his occupation only for a time, but Mrs. Verrall possessed no occupation from year's end to year's end. Her hands had no duties to perform, no labour to transact: she never touched anything in the shape of ornamental work; she rarely, if ever, opened a book. She was one of those who possess no resources within themselves: and, may Heaven have mercy upon all such!

By-and-by, after Rodolf had smoked two cigars outside, and had lounged in again, pretty nearly done to death with the effort to kill time, Charlotte returned. She came in at the open window, apparently in the highest spirits, her face sparkling.

"Did you hear the bells?" asked she.

"I did," answered Rodolf. "I heard them when I was out just now."

"The town's quite in a commotion," Charlotte resumed. "Half the ragamuffins in the place are collected round the Rectory gates: they had better let the beadle get amongst them!"

"Commotion or no commotion, I know I have not had a soul to call here!" grumbled Mrs. Verrall. "Where have you been, Charlotte?"

"At Lady Sarah's. And I have had the great honour of seeing the bride and bridegroom!" went on Charlotte, in a tone of complaisance so intense as to savour of mockery. "They came driving by in their carriage, and we had full view of them."

This somewhat aroused Mrs. Verrall from her listlessness. "They have started, then! How did she look Charlotte?"

"Look!" cried Charlotte. "She looked as she usually looks, for all I saw, His cheeks were hectic; I could see that. Mr. George must take care of himself yet, I fancy."

"How was she dressed?" questioned Mrs. Verrall again.

"Could I see?—seated low in the carriage, as she was, and leaning back in it!" retorted Charlotte. "She wore a white bonnet and veil, and that's all I can tell you. Margery and Pearce were with them. Kate, don't you think Lady Sarah must feel this day? A few months ago, and it was her daughter who was on the point of marriage with a Godolphin. But she did not seem to think of it. She'd give her head for a daughter of hers to wed a Godolphin still."

Mrs. Verrall raised her eyes to Charlotte's with an expression of simple astonishment. The remark mystified her. Mrs. Verrall could boast little depth of any sort, and never saw half as far as Charlotte did. Charlotte resumed.

"I saw; I know: I have seen and known ever since Ethel died. My lady would like Sarah Anne to take Ethel's place with Thomas Godolphin."

"I can hardly believe that, Charlotte."

"Disbelieve it then," equably responded Charlotte, as she passed out to the terrace, and began calling to her dogs. They came noisily up in answer, and Charlotte disappeared with them.

And Mr. Rodolf Pain, sitting there in his embroidered chair, with a swelling heart, remarked that Charlotte had not vouchsafed the smallest notice to him. "I wouldn't stop another hour," he murmured to himself, "only that my going back would put up Verrall and—and it might not do."

Very intense was that gentleman's surprise to see, not two minutes after, Mr. Verrall himself enter the room by the window. Mrs. Verrall gave a little shriek of astonishment; and the new-corner, throwing his summer overcoat upon a chair, shook hands with his wife, and gave her a kiss. Plenty of dust was mingled with his yellow whiskers, and his moustache.

"I came third-class most of the way," explained Mr. Verrall, as an apology for the dust. "The first-class carriage was stuffing hot, and there was no getting a smoke in it. We had a troublesome guard: the fellow excused himself by saying one of the directors was in the train."

"I have been all this time rubbing my eyes to find out whether they are deceiving me," cried Rodolf Pain. "Who was to dream of seeing you here to-day, sir?"

"I should think you expected to see me before, Rodolf," was Mr. Verrall's answer.

"Well, so I did. But it seemed to be put off so long, that I am surprised to see you now. Is—is all straight?"

"Quite straight," replied Mr. Verrall; "after an overwhelming amount of bother. You are going up to-day, Pain."

"And not sorry to hear it, either," cried Rodolf Pain, with emphasis. "I am sick of having nothing to do. Is Appleby settled?" he added, dropping his voice.

Mr. Verrall gave a nod; and, drawing Rodolf Pain to a far window, stood there talking to him for some minutes in an undertone. Mrs.

Verrall, who never concerned herself with matters of business, never would listen to them, went out on the terrace, a pale pink parasol with its white fringe, held between her face and the sun. While thus standing, the distant bells of All Souls', which had been ringing occasional peals throughout the day, smote faintly upon her ear. She went in again.

"Verrall," said she, "if you come out, you can hear the bells. Do you know what they are ringing for?"

"What bells? Why should I listen to them?" inquired Mr. Verrall, turning from Rodolf Pain.

"They are ringing for George Godolphin's wedding. He has been married to-day."

The information appeared—as Rodolf Pain would have expressed it, had he given utterance to his sentiments—to strike Mr. Verrall all of a heap. "George Godolphin married to-day!" he repeated, in profound astonishment, remembering the weak state George had been in when he had left Prior's Ash, some weeks before. "Married or buried, do you mean?"

Mrs. Verrall laughed. "Oh, he has got well from his illness: or, nearly so," she said. "The bells would ring muffled peals, if he were buried, Verrall, as they did for Sir George."

"And whom has he married?" continued Mr. Verrall, not in the least getting over his astonishment.

"Maria Hastings."

Mr. Verrall stroked his yellow moustache; a somewhat recent appendage to his beauty. He was by no means a demonstrative man—except on rare occasions—and though the tidings evidently made a marked impression on him, he said nothing. "Is Charlotte at the wedding?" he casually asked.

"No strangers were invited," replied Mrs. Verrall. "Lady Godolphin came for it, and is staying at Ashlydyat. She has put off her weeds for to-day, and appears in colours: glad enough, I know, of the excuse for doing so."

"Where is Charlotte?" resumed Mr. Verrall.

He happened to look at Rodolf Pain as he spoke, and the latter answered, pointing towards some trees on the right.

"She went down there with her dogs. I'll go and find her."

Mr. Verrall watched him away, and then turned to his wife: speaking; however, impassively still.

"You say he has married Maria Hastings? How came Charlotte to let him slip through her fingers?"

"Because she could not help it, I suppose," replied Mrs. Verrall, shrugging her pretty shoulders. "I never thought Charlotte had any chance with George Godolphin, Maria Hastings being in the way. Had Charlotte been first in the field it might have made all the difference. He had fallen in love with Maria Hastings before he ever saw Charlotte."

Mr. Verrall superciliously drew down his lips at the corners. "Don't talk about a man's 'falling in love' Kate. Girls fall in love: men know better. Charlotte has played her cards badly," he added, with some emphasis.

"I don't know, said Mrs. Verrall. "That Charlotte would play them to the best of her ability, there's little doubt; but, as I say, she had no chance from the first. I think George did love Maria Hastings. I'm sure they have been together enough, he and Charlotte, and they have flirted enough: but, as to caring for Charlotte, I don't believe George cared for her any more than he cared for me. They have gone abroad for the winter: will be away six months or more."

"I am sorry for that," quietly remarked Mr. Verrall. "I was in hopes to have made some use of Mr. George Godolphin."

"Use?" cried Mrs. Verrall. "What use?"

"Oh, nothing," carelessly replied Mr. Verrall. "A little matter of business that I was going to propose to him."

"Won't it do when he comes home?"

"I dare say it may," said Mr. Verrall.

Mr. Rodolf Pain had walked to the right, and plunged into the grove of trees in search of Charlotte. He was not long in finding her. The noise made by her dogs was sufficient guide to him. In one respect Charlotte Pain was better off than her sister, Mrs. Verrall: she found more resources for killing time, Charlotte had no greater taste for books than Mrs. Verrall had: if she took one up, it was only to fling it down again: she did not draw, she did not work. For some reasons of her own, Charlotte kept an ornamental piece of work in hand, which never got finished. Once in a way, upon rare occasions, it was taken up, and a couple of stitches done to it; and then, like the book, it was flung down again. Charlotte played well; nay, brilliantly: but she never played to amuse herself, or for the love of music—always for display. The resources which Charlotte possessed above Mrs. Verrall, lay in her horsemanship and her dogs. Mrs. Verrall could ride, and sometimes did so; but it was always in a decorous manner. She did not gallop, helter-skelter, across country, as Charlotte did, with half a dozen cavaliers barely keeping up with her: she took no pleasure in horses for themselves, and she would as soon have entered a pigsty as a stable. With all Mrs. Verrall's vanity, and her not over-strong intellect, she possessed more of the refinement of the gentlewoman than did Charlotte.

Look at Charlotte now: as Rodolf Pain—a cigar, which he had just lighted, between his lips, and his hands in his pockets—approaches her. She is standing on a garden bench, with the King Charley in her arms: the other two dogs she has set on to fight at her feet, their muzzles lying on the bench beside her. What with the natural tempers of these two agreeable animals, and what with Charlotte's frequent pastime of exasperating the one against the other, it had been found necessary to keep them muzzled to prevent quarrels: but Charlotte delighted in removing the muzzles, and setting them on, as she had done now. Charlotte had these resources in addition to any possessed by Mrs. Verrall. Mrs. Verrall would not, of her own free will, have touched a dog with her finger: if compelled to do so, it would have been accomplished in the most gingerly fashion with the extreme tip: and it was a positive source of annoyance to Mrs. Verrall, often of contention between them, Charlotte's admitting these dogs to familiar companionship. Charlotte, when weary from want of pastime, could find it in the stables, or with her dogs. Many

an hour did she thus pass: and, so far, she had the advantage of Mrs. Verrall. Mrs. Verrall often told Charlotte that she ought to have been born a man: it cannot be denied that some of her tastes were more appropriate to a man than to a gentlewoman.

Rodolf Pain reached the bench. It was a lovely spot, secluded and shaded by trees; with an opening in front to admit a panoramic view of the enchanting scenery. But, on the mossy turf between that bench and the opening, snarled and fought those awful dogs: neither the noise nor the pastime particularly in accordance with that pleasant spot, so suggestive of peace. Charlotte looked on approvingly, giving a helping word to either side which she might deem required it; while the King Charley barked and struggled in her arms, because he was restrained from joining in the mêlée.

"I am going up at last, Charlotte."

"Up where?" asked Charlotte, without turning her eyes on Rodolf Pain.

"To town. Verrall's come back."

Surprise caused her to look at him now. "Verrall back!" she uttered. "He has come suddenly, then; he was not back five minutes ago. When are you going up?"

"I will tell you all about it if you'll muzzle those brutes, and so stop their noise."

"Muzzle them yourself." said Charlotte, kicking the muzzles on to the grass with her foot.

Mr. Pain accomplished his task, though he did not particularly like it; neither was it an easy one: the dogs were ferocious at the moment. He then drove them away, and Charlotte dropped her King Charley that he might run after them; which he did, barking his short squeaking bark. Rodolf held out his hand to help Charlotte down from the bench; but Charlotte chose to remain where she was, and seated herself on one of its arms. Rodolf Pain took a seat on the bench sideways, so as to face her, leaning his back against the other arm.

"When do you go?" repeated Charlotte.

"In an hour from this."

"Quick work," remarked Charlotte. "Verrall gives no time for the grass to grow in anything he has to do with."

"The quick departure is mine," said Mr. Pain. "So that I am in town for business to-morrow morning, it's all that Verrall cares about. He suggested that I should go up by a night train."

"I should," cried Charlotte, bluntly.

"No you would not," answered Rudolf Pain in a tone of bitterness. "Were you treated by any one as you treat me, you'd be glad enough to get away."

"That's good!" ejaculated Charlotte with a ringing laugh. "I'm sure I treat you beautifully. Many a one would jump at getting the treatment from me that I give you; I can tell you that, Mr. Dolf."

Mr. Dolf smoked on in silence; rather savagely for him.

"What have you to complain of?" pursued Charlotte.

"This," said he, sternly. "That you promised to be my wife; that you have led me on, Heaven knows how long, causing me to believe you meant what you said, that you would keep your promise; and now you coolly turn round and jilt me! That bare fact, is quite enough, Charlotte, without going into another mortifying fact—your slighting behaviour to me lately."

"Who says I have jilted you—or that I mean to jilt you?" asked Charlotte.

"Who says it?" retorted Rodolf Pain. "Why—are you not doing so?"

"No. I dare say I shall have you some time."

"I am getting tired of it, Charlotte," said he, in a weary tone of pain. "I have cared for nothing but you in the world—in the shape of

woman—but I am getting tired; and I have had enough to make me. If you will fix our wedding now, before I go up, and keep to it, I'll bless you for it, and make you a fonder husband than George Godolphin would have made you."

"How dare you mention George Godolphin to me in that way?" cried Charlotte, with flashing eyes, for the sentence had roused all her ire. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dolf Pain! Has not George Godolphin—as it turns out—been engaged to Maria Hastings longer than I have known him, and has now married her? Do you suppose I could have spent that time with them both, in Scotland, at Lady Godolphin's, and not have become acquainted with their secret? That must prove what your senseless jealousy was worth!"

"Charlotte," said he, meekly, "as to George Godolphin, I readily confess I was mistaken, and I am sorry to have been so stupid. You might have set me right with a word, but I suppose you preferred to tease me. However, he is done with now. But, Charlotte, I tell you that altogether I am getting tired of it. Have me, or not, as you feel you can: but, played with any longer, I will not be. If you dismiss me now, you dismiss me for good."

"I have half a mind to say yes," returned Charlotte, in the coolest tone, as if she were deciding a trifling matter—the choice of a bonnet, or the route to be pursued in a walk. "But there's one thing holds me back, Dolf."

"What's that?" asked Doff, whose cheek had lighted up with eager hope.

Charlotte leaped off the bench and sat down on it, nearer to Dolf, her accent and face as apparently honest as if fibs were unknown to her. "And it is the only thing which has held me back all along," she went on, staring unflinchingly into Doll's eyes.

"Well, what is it?" cried he.

"The hazard of the step."

"The hazard!" repeated Dolf. "What hazard?"

Charlotte glanced round, as if to convince herself that nothing with human ears was near, and her voice dropped to a whisper. "You and Verrall are not upon the safest course—"

"It's as safe as many others," interrupted Dolf Pain.

"Don't bother about others," testily rebuked Charlotte. "Look to itself. I say that it is hazardous: what little I know of it tells me that. I have heard a word dropped by you and a word dropped by Verrall, and I can put two and two together as well as most people. Is there no danger, no chance," she spoke lower still, and with unmistakable gravity—"that a crisis might come, which—which would carry you to a place where nobody stands willingly—the Criminal Bar?"

"Good gracious, no!" cried Rodolf Pain, flinging his cigar away in his surprise and anger. "What could put that into your head, Charlotte? The—profession—not be one of the strictest honour, and it has its dark sides as well as its light; but there's no danger of such a thing as you hint at. Where did you pick up the idea?"

"I don't know where. I have caught a word or two, not meant for me; and now and then I see things reported in the newspapers. You can't deny one thing, Dolf: that, if any unpleasantness should drop from the skies, it has been made a matter of arrangement that you should be the sufferer, not Verrall."

Rodolf's light eyes expanded beyond common. "How did you get to know that?" he asked.

"Never mind how I got to know it. Is it so?"

"Yes, it is," acknowledged Mr. Pain, who was by nature more truthful than Charlotte. "But I give you my word of honour, Charlotte, that there's no danger of our falling into such a pit as you have hinted at. We should not be such fools. The worst that could happen to me would be a sojourn, short or long, in some snug place such as this, while Verrall puts things right. As it has been now, for instance, through this business of Appleby's."

"You tell me this to satisfy me," said Charlotte.

"I tell it because it is truth—so far as my belief goes, and as far as I can now foresee."

"Very well. I accept it," returned Charlotte. "But now, Rodolf, mark what I say. If this worst state of things should come to pass—"

"It won't, I tell you," he interrupted. "It can't."

"Will you listen? I choose to put the matter upon a supposition that it may do so. If this state of things should come to pass and you fall; I will never fall with you; and it is only upon that condition that will become your wife."

The words puzzled Mr. Pain not a little. "I don't understand you, Charlotte. As to 'conditions,' you may make any for yourself that you please—in reason."

"Very well. We will have an understanding with each other, drawn up as elaborately as if it were a marriage settlement," she said, laughing. "Yes, Mr. Rodolf, while you have been ill-naturedly accusing me of designs upon the heart of George Godolphin, I was occupied with precautions touching my married life with you. You don't deserve me; and that's a fact. Let go my hand, will you. One of those dogs has got unmuzzled, I fancy, by the noise, and I must run or there'll be murder committed."

"Charlotte," he cried, feverishly and eagerly, not letting go her hand, "when shall it be?"

"As you like," she answered indifferently. "This month, or next month, or the month after: I don't care."

The tone both mortified and pained him. His brow knit: and Charlotte saw the impression her words had made. She put on a pretty look of contrition.

"Mind, Rodolf, it shall be an understood thing beforehand that you don't attempt to control me in the smallest particular: that I have my own way in everything."

"You will take care to have that, Charlotte, whether it be an understood thing beforehand, or not," replied he.

The Shadow of Ashlydyat, Volume I

Charlotte laughed as she walked away. A ringing laugh of power, which the air echoed: of power, at any rate, over the heart and will of Mr. Rodolf Pain.

Part 1. Chapter 22.

DANGEROUS AMUSEMENT.

On an April day, sunny and charming, a gentleman with a lady on his arm was strolling down one of the narrowest and dirtiest streets of Homburg. A tall man was he, tall and handsome, with a fair Saxon face, and fair Saxon curls that shimmered like gold in the sunlight. Could it be George Godolphin — who had gone away from Prior's Ash six months before, nothing but a shadowy wreck. It was George safe enough; restored to full strength, to perfect health. Maria, on the contrary, looked thin and delicate, and her face had lost a good deal of its colour. They had wintered chiefly at Pau, but had left it a month past. Since then they had travelled about from place to place, by short stages, taking it easy, as George called it: staying a day or two in one town, a day or two in another, turning to the right or left, as inclination led them, going forward, or backward. So that they were home by the middle of April, it would be time enough. George had received *carte blanche* from Thomas Godolphin to remain out as long as he thought it necessary; and George was not one to decline the privilege. Play before work had always been George's motto.

On the previous evening they had arrived at Homburg from Wiesbaden, and were now taking their survey of the place. Neither liked its appearance so much as they had done many other places, and they were mutually agreeing to leave it again that evening, when a turning in the street brought them in view of another lady and gentleman, arm in arm as they were.

"English, I- am sure," remarked Maria, in a low tone.

"I should think so!" replied George, laughing. "Don't you recognize them?"

She had recognized them ere George finished speaking. Mr. and Mrs. Verrall! It took about ten minutes to ask and answer questions. "How strange that we should not have met before!" Mrs. Verrall cried. "We have been here a fortnight. But perhaps you have only just come?"

"Only last night," said George.

"My wife turned ill for a foreign tour, so I indulged her," explained

Mr. Verrall. "We have been away a month now."

"And a fortnight of it at Homburg!" exclaimed George in surprise. "What attraction can you find here? Maria and I were just saying that we would leave it to-night."

"It's as good as any other of these German places, for all I see," carelessly remarked Mr. Verrall. "How well you are looking!" he added to George.

"I cannot pay you the same compliment," Mrs. Verrall said to Maria. "What have you done with your roses?"

Maria's "roses" came vividly into her cheeks at the question. "I am not in strong health just now," was all she answered.

George smiled. "There's nothing seriously the matter, Mrs. Verrall," said he. "Maria will find her roses again after a while. Charlotte has—I was going to say, changed her name," broke off George; "but in her case that would be a wrong figure of speech. She is married, we hear."

"Long ago," said Mrs. Verrall. "Charlotte's quite an old married woman by this time. It took place—let me see!—last November. They live in London"

"Mr. Pain is her cousin, is he not?"

"Yes. It was an old engagement," continued Mrs. Verrall, looking at George. "Many a time, when she and you were flirting together, I had to call her to account, and remind her of Mr. Pain."

George could not remember that Mrs. Verrall had ever done such a thing in his presence: and she had been rather remarkable for not interfering: for leaving him and Charlotte to go their own way. But he did not say so.

They turned and continued their walk together. George—he had lost none of his gallantry—taking his place by the side of Mrs. Verrall.

In passing a spot where there was a partial obstruction, some confusion occurred. A house was under repair, and earth and stones lay half-way across the street, barely giving room for any vehicle to pass. Just as they were opposite this, a lumbering coach, containing a gay party with white bows in their caps—probably a christening—came rattling up at a sharp pace George Godolphin, taking Mrs. Verrall's hand, piloted her to safety. Maria was not so fortunate. Mr. Verrall was a little behind her or before her: at any rate, he was not adroit enough to assist her at the right moment; and Maria, seeing no escape between the coach and the debris, jumped upon the latter. The stones moved under her feet, and she slipped off again to the other side. It did not hurt her much, but it shook her greatly. George, who was looking back at the time, had sprung back and caught her before Mr. Verrall well saw what had occurred.

"My darling, how did it happen? Are you hurt? Verrall, could you not have taken better care?" he reiterated, his face flushed with emotion and alarm.

Maria leaned heavily upon him, and drew a long breath before she could speak. "I am not hurt, George."

"Are you sure?" he anxiously cried.

Maria smiled reassuringly. "It is nothing indeed. It has only shaken me. See! I am quite free from the stones. I must have been careless, I think."

George turned to look at the stones. Quite a heap of them, two or three feet from the ground. She had alighted on her feet; not quite falling; but slipping with the lower part of her back against the stones. Mrs. Verrall shook the dust from her dress, and Mr. Verrall apologized for his inattention.

George took her upon his arm, with an air that seemed to intimate he should not trust her to any one again, and they went back to their hotel, Mrs. Verrall saying she should call upon them in half an hour's time.

Maria was looking pale; quite white. George, in much concern, untied her bonnet-strings. "Maria, I fear you are hurt!"

"Indeed I am not—as I believe," she answered. "Why do you think so?"

"Because you are not looking well."

"I was startled at the time; frightened. I shall get over it directly, George."

"I think you had better see a doctor. I suppose there's a decent one to be found in the town."

"Oh no!" returned Maria, with much emphasis, in her surprise. "See a doctor because I slipped down a little? Why, George, that would be foolish! I have often jumped from a higher height than that. Do you remember the old wall at the Rectory? We children were for ever jumping from it."

"That was one time, and this is another, Mrs. George Godolphin," said he, significantly.

Maria laughed. "Only fancy the absurdity, George! Were a doctor called in, his first question would be, 'Where are you hurt, madame?' 'Not anywhere, monsieur,' would be my reply. 'Then what do you want with me?' he would say, and how foolish I should look!"

George laughed too, and resigned the point. "You are the better judge, of course, Maria. Margery," he continued—for Margery, at that moment, entered the room—"your mistress has had a fall."

"A fall!" uttered Margery, in her abrupt way, as she turned to regard Maria.

"It could not be called a fall, Margery," said Maria, slightly.

I slipped off some earth and stones. I did not quite fall."

"Are you hurt, ma'am?"

"It did not hurt me at all. It only shook me."

Nasty things, those slips are sometimes!" resumed Margery. "I have known pretty good illnesses grow out of 'em."

George did not like the remark. He deemed it thoughtless of Margery to make it in the presence of his wife, under the circumstances. "You must croak, or it would not be you, Margery," said he, in a vexed tone.

It a little put up Margery. "I can tell you what, Master George," cried she; "your own mother was in her bed for eight weeks, through nothing on earth but slipping down two stairs. I say those shakes are ticklish things—when one is not in a condition to bear them. Ma'am, you must just take my advice, and lie down on that sofa, and not get off it for the rest of the day. There's not a doctor in the land as knows anything, hut would say the same."

Margery was peremptory; George joined her in being peremptory also; and Maria, with much laughter and protestation, was fain to let them place her on the sofa. "Just as if I were ill, or delicate!" she grumbled.

"And pray, ma'am, what do you call yourself but delicate? You are not one of the strong ones," cried Margery, as she left the room for a shawl.

George drew his wife's face to his in an impulse of affection, and kissed it. "Don't pay any attention to Margery's croaking, my dearest," he fondly said. "But she is quite right in recommending you to lie still. It will rest you."

"I am afraid I shall go to sleep, if I am condemned to lie here," said Mai4a.

"The best thing you can do," returned George. "Catch me trusting you to any one's care again!"

In a short time Mrs. Verrall came in, and told George that her husband was waiting for him outside. George went out, and Mrs. Verrall sat down by Maria.

"It is Margery's doings, Margery's and George's," said Maria, as if she would apologize for being found on the sofa, covered up like an invalid. "They made me lie down."

"Are you happy?" Mrs. Verrall somewhat abruptly asked.

"Happy?" repeated Maria, at a loss to understand the exact meaning of the words.

"Happy with George Godolphin. Are you and he happy with each other?"

A soft blush overspread Maria's face; a light of love shone in her eyes. "oh, so happy!" she murmured. "Mrs. Verrall, I wonder sometimes whether any one in the world is as happy as I am!"

"Because it struck me that you were changed; you look ill."

"Oh, that!" returned Maria, with a rosier blush still. "Can't you guess-the cause of that, Mrs. Verrall? As George told you, I shall, I hope, look well again, after a time."

Mrs. Verrall shrugged her shoulders with indifference. She had never lost her bloom from any such cause.

Maria found—or Margery did for her—that the fall had shaken her more than was expedient. After all, a medical man had to be called in. Illness supervened. It was not a very serious illness, and not at all dangerous; but it had the effect of detaining them at Homburg.

Maria lay in bed, and George spent most of his time with the Verralls. With Mr. Verrall chiefly. Especially in an evening. George would go out, sometimes before dinner, sometimes after it and come home so late that he did not venture into Maria's room to say good night to her. Since her illness he had occupied an adjoining chamber. It did Maria no good: she would grow flushed, excited, heated: and when George did come in, he would look flushed and excited also.

But, George, where do you stay so late?"

Only with Verrall."

"You look so hot. I am sure you are feverish."

"The rooms were very hot. We have been watching them play. Good night, darling. I wish you were well!"

Watching them play! It is your first deceit to your wife, George Godolphin; and, rely upon it, no good will come of it. Mr. Verrall had introduced George to the dangerous gaming-tables; had contrived to imbue him with a liking for the insidious vice. Did he do so with—as our law terms express it—malice aforethought? Let the response lie with Mr. Verrall.

On the very first evening that they were together, the day of the slight accident to Maria, Mr. Verrall asked George to dine with him; and he afterwards took him to the tables. George did not play that evening; but he grew excited, watching others play. Heavy stakes were lost and won; evil passions were called forth; avarice, hatred, despair. Mr. Verrall played for a small sum; and won. "It whiles away an hour or two," he carelessly remarked to George, as they were leaving. "And one can take care of one's self."

"All can't take care of themselves, apparently," answered George Godolphin. "Did you observe that haggard-looking Englishman, leaning against the wall and biting his nails when his money had gone? The expression of that man's face will haunt me for a week to come. Those are the men who commit suicide."

Mr. Verrall smiled, half-mockingly. "Suicide! Not they," he answered. "The man will be there to-morrow evening, refeathered."

"I never felt more pity for any one in my life," continued George. "There was despair in his face, if I ever saw despair. I could have found in my heart to go up and offer him my purse; only I knew it would be staked the next moment at the table."

"You did not know him, then?"

"No."

Mr. Verrall mentioned the man's name, and George felt momentarily surprised. He was a noted baronet's eldest son.

The next evening came round. Maria was confined to her bed then, and George was a gentleman at large. A gentleman at large to be pounced upon by Mr. Verrall. He came—Verrall—and carried George off again to dinner.

"Let us take a stroll," he said, later in the evening.

Their stroll took them towards the scene of the night before, Mr. Verrall's being the moving will. "Shall we see who's there?" he said, with great apparent indifference.

George answered as indifferently: but there was an undercurrent of meaning in his tone, wonderful for careless George Godolphin. "Better keep out of temptation."

Mr. Verrall laughed till the tears came into his eyes: he said George made him laugh. "Come along," cried he, mockingly. "I'll take care of you."

That night George played. A little. "As well put a gold piece clown," Mr. Verrall whispered to him; "I shall." George staked more than one gold piece; and won. A fortnight had gone over since then, and George Godolphin had become imbued with the fearful passion of gambling. At any rate, imbued with it temporarily: it is to be hoped that he will leave it behind him when he leaves Homburg.

Just look at him, as he stands over that green cloth, with a flushed face and eager eyes! He is of finer form, of loftier stature than most of those who are crowding round the tables; his features betray higher intellect, greater refinement; but the same passions are just now distorting them. Mr. Verrall is by his side, cool, calm, impassive: somehow, that man, Verrall, always wins. If he did not, he would not lose his coolness: he would only leave the tables.

"Rouge," called George.

It was noir. George flung his last money on the board, and moved away.

Mr. Verrall followed him. "Tired already?"

Mr. George let slip a furious word. "The luck has been against me all along; almost from the first night I played here. I am cleaned out again."

"I can let you have—"

"Thank you!" hastily interrupted George. "You are very accommodating, Verrall, but it seems we may go on at the same thing for ever: I losing, and you finding me money. How much is it that I owe you altogether?"

"A bagatelle. Never mind that."

"A bagatelle!" repeated George. "It's well money is so valueless to you: I Don't call it one. And I have never been a man given to looking at money before spending it."

"You can pay me when and how you like. This year, next year, the year after: I shan't sue you for it," laughed Mr. Verrall. "There I go and redeem your luck."

He held out a heavy roll of notes to George. The latter's eager fingers clutched them: but, even as they were within his grasp, better thoughts came to him. He pushed them back again.

"I am too deeply in your debt already, Verrall."

"As you please," returned Mr. Verrall, with indifference. "There the notes are, lying idle. As to what you have had, if it's so dreadful a burden on your conscience, you can give me interest for it. You can let the principal lie, I say, though it be for ten years to come. One half-hour's play with these notes may redeem all you have lost"

He left the notes lying by George Godolphin—by hesitating George—with the fierce passion to use them that was burning within him. Mr. Verrall could not have taken a more efficient way of inducing him to play again, than to affect this easy indifference, and to leave the money under his eyes, touching his fingers, fevering his brain. George took up the notes.

"You are sure you will let me pay you interest, Verrall?"

"Of course I will."

And George walked off to the gaming-table.

He went home later that night than he had gone at all, wiping the perspiration from his brow, lifting his face to the quiet stars, and gasping to catch a breath of air. Mr. Verrall found it rather cool, than not; shrugged his shoulders, and said he could do with an overcoat; but George felt stifled. The roll had gone; and more to it had gone; and George Godolphin was Mr. Verrall's debtor to a heavy amount.

"Thank goodness the day has already dawned!" involuntarily broke from George.

Mr. Verrall looked at him for an explanation. He did not understand what particular cause for thankfulness there should be in that.

"We shall get away from the place to-day," said George. "If I stopped in it I should come to the dogs."

"Nothing of the sort," cried Mr. Verrall. "Luck is safe to turn some time. It's like the tide it has its time for flowing in, and its time for flowing out; once let it turn, and it comes rushing in all one way. But, what do you mean about going? Your wife is not well enough to travel yet."

"Yes she is," was George's answer. "Quite well enough."

"Of course you know best. I think you should consider—"

"Verrall, I should consider my wife's health and safety before any earthly thing," interrupted George. "We might have started to-day, had we liked: I speak of the day that has gone the doctor said yesterday that she was well enough to travel."

"I was not aware of that. I shall remain here a week longer."

"And I shall be away before to-morrow night."

"Not you," cried Mr. Verrall.

"I shall: if I keep in the mind I am in now."

Mr. Verrall smiled. He knew George was not famous for keeping his resolutions. In the morning, when his smarting should be over, he would stay on, fast enough. They wished each other good night, and George turned into his hotel.

To his great surprise, Margery met him on the stairs. "Are you walking the house as the ghosts do?" cried he, with a renewal of his good-humour. Nothing pleased George better than to give old Margery a joking or a teasing word. "Why are you not in bed?"

"There's enough ghosts in the world, it's my belief; without my personating them, sir," was Margery's answer. "I'm not in bed yet, because my mistress is not in bed."

"Your mistress not in bed!" repeated George. "But that is very wrong."

"So it is," said Margery. "But it has been of no use my telling her so. She took it into her head to sit up for you; and sit up she has. Not there, sir" —for he was turning to their sitting-room—"she is lying back in the big chair in her bedroom."

George entered. Maria, white and wan and tired, was lying back, as Margery expressed it, in the large easy-chair. She was too fatigued, too exhausted to get up, she only held out her hand to her husband,

"My darling, you know this is wrong," he gently said, bending over her. "Good heavens, Maria! how ill and tired you look!"

"I should not have slept had I gone to bed," she said. "George, tell me where you have been: where it is that you go in an evening?"

A misgiving crossed George Godolphin's mind—that she already knew where. She looked painfully distressed, and there was a peculiar significance in her tone, but she spoke with timid deprecation. His conscience told him that the amusement he had been recently pursuing would not show out well in the broad light of day. An unmarried man may send himself to ruin if it pleases him to do it; but not one who has assumed the responsibilities of George Godolphin. Ruin, however, had not yet come to George Godolphin,

or fear of ruin. The worst that had happened was, that he had contracted a debt to Mr. Verrall, which he did not at present see his way clear to paying. He could not refund so large a sum out of the bank without the question being put by his partners, Where does it go to? Mr. Verrall had relieved him of the embarrassment by suggesting interest. A very easy settling of the question it appeared to the careless mind of George Godolphin: and he felt obliged to Mr. Verrall.

"Maria!" he exclaimed, "what are you thinking of? What is the matter?"

Maria changed her position. She let her head glide from the chair onto his sheltering arm. "Mrs. Verrall frightened me, George. Will you be angry with me if I tell you? She came in this evening, and she said you and Mr. Verrall were losing all your money at the gaming-table."

George Godolphin's face grew hot and angry, worse than it had been in the gambling-room, and mentally he gave Mrs. Verrall an exceedingly uncomplimentary word. "What possessed her to say that?" he exclaimed. And in truth he wondered what could have possessed her. Verrall, at any rate, was not losing his money. "Were you so foolish as to believe it, Maria?"

"Only a little of it, George. Pray forgive me! I am weak just now, you know, and things startle me. I have heard dreadful tales of these foreign gaming-places: and I knew how much you had been out at night since we came here. It is not so, is it, George?"

George made a show of laughing at her anxiety. "I and Verrall have strolled into the places and watched the play," said he. "We have staked a few coins ourselves—not to be looked upon as two churls who put their British noses into everything and then won't pay for the privilege. I lost what I staked, with a good grace; but as to Verrall, I don't believe he is a halfpenny out of pocket. Mrs. Verrall must have been quarrelling with her husband, and so thought she'd say something to spite him. And my wife must take it for gospel, and begin to fret herself into a fever!"

Maria drew a long, relieved breath. The address was candid, the manner was playful and tender: and she possessed the most implicit

faith in her husband. Maria had doubted almost the whole world before she could have doubted George Godolphin. She drew his face down to hers, once more whispering that he was to forgive her for being so silly.

"My dearest, I have been thinking that we may as well go on tomorrow. To-day, that is: I won't tell you the time, if you don't know it; but it's morning."

She knew the time quite well. No anxious wife ever sat up for a husband yet, but knew it. In her impatience to be away—for she was most desirous of being at home again—she could take note of the one sentence only. "Oh, George, yes! Let us go!"

"Will you promise to get a good night's rest first, and not attempt to be out of bed before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, then?"

"George, I will promise you anything," she cried, with a radiant face. "Only say we shall start for home to-morrow!"

"Yes, We will."

And, somewhat to Mr. Verrall's surprise, they did start. That gentleman made no attempt to detain them. "But it is shabby of you both to go off like this, and leave us among these foreigners, like Babes in the wood," said he, when Maria was already in the carriage, and George was about to step into it.

"There is nothing to prevent you leaving too, is there, Mr. Verrall?" asked Maria, leaning forward. "And what did you and Mrs. Verrall do before we came? You had been 'Babes in the wood' a fortnight then."

"Fairly put, young lady," returned Mr. Verrall. "I must congratulate you on one thing, Mrs. George Godolphin: that, in spite of your recent indisposition, you are looking more yourself to-day than I have yet seen you."

"That is because I am going home," said Maria.

And home they reached in safety. The land journey, the pleasant sea crossing—for the day and the waters were alike calm—and then the

land again, all grew into things of the past, and they were once more at Prior's Ash. As they drove to the Bank from the railway station, Maria looked up at the house when it came into sight, a thrill of joy running through her heart. "What a happy home it will be for me!" was her glad thought.

"What would Thomas and old Crosse say, if they knew I had dipped into it so deeply at Homburg?" was the involuntary thought which flashed across George Godolphin.

Quite a levee had assembled to meet them. Mrs. Hastings and Grace, Bessie and Cecil Godolphin, Thomas Godolphin and Mr. Crosse. Maria threw off her bonnet and shawl, and stood amidst them all in her dark silk travelling dress. There was no mistaking that she was intensely happy: her eye was radiant, her colour softly bright, her fair young face without a cloud. And now walked in the Rector of All Souls', having escaped (nothing loth) from a stormy vestry meeting, to see Maria.

"I have brought her home safely, you see, sir," George said to Mr. Hastings, leading Maria up to him.

"And yourself also," was the Rector's reply. "You are worth two of the shaky man who went away."

"I told you I should be, sir, if you allowed Maria to go with me," cried gallant George. "I do not fancy we are either of us the worse for our sojourn abroad."

"I don't think either of you look as though you were," said the Rector. "Maria is thin. I suppose you are not sorry to come home, Miss Maria?"

"So glad!" she said. "I began to think it very, very long, not to see you all. But, papa, I am not Miss Maria now."

"You saucy child!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings. But the Rector had the laugh against him. Mrs. Hastings drew Maria aside.

"My dear, you have been ill, George wrote me word. How did it happen? We were so sorry to hear it."

"Yes, we were sorry too," replied Maria, her eyelashes resting on her hot cheek. "It could not be helped."

"But how did it happen?"

"It was my own fault: not intentionally, you know, mamma. It occurred the day after we reached Homburg. I and George were out walking and we met the Verralls. We turned with them, and then I had not hold of George's arm. Something was amiss in the street, a great heap of stones and earth and rubbish; and, to avoid a carriage that came by, I stepped upon it. And, somehow I slipped off. I did not appear to have hurt myself: but I suppose it shook me."

"You met the Verralls at Homburg?" cried Mrs. Hastings, in surprise.

"Yes. Did George not mention it when he wrote? They are at Homburg still. Unless they have now left it."

"George never puts a superfluous word into his letters," said Mrs. Hastings, with a smile. "He says just what he has to say, and no more. He mentioned that you were not well, and therefore some little delay might take place in the return home; but he said nothing of the Verralls."

Maria laughed. "George never writes a long letter—"

"Who's that, taking George's name in vain?" cried George, looking round.

"It is I, George. You never told mamma, when you wrote, that the Verralls were with us at Homburg."

"I'm sure I don't remember whether I did or not," said George.

"The Verralls are in Wales," observed Mr. Hastings.

"Then they have travelled to it pretty quickly," observed George. "When I and Maria quitted Homburg we left them in it. They had been there a month."

Not one present but looked up with surprise. "The impression in Prior's Ash is, that they are in Wales," observed Thomas Godolphin. "It is the answer given by the servants to all callers at Lady Godolphin's Folly."

"They are certainly at Homburg; whatever the servants may say," persisted George. "The servants are labouring under a mistake."

"It is a curious mistake for the servants to make, though," observed the Rector, in a dry, caustic tone.

"I think the Verralls are curious people altogether," said Bessy Godolphin.

"I don't know but they are," assented George. "But Verrall is a thoroughly good-hearted man, and I shall always speak up for him."

That evening, George and his wife dined alone. George was standing over the fire after dinner, when Maria came and stood near him. He put out his arm and drew her to his side.

"It seems so strange, George—being in this house with you, all alone," she whispered.

"Stranger than being my wife, Maria?"

"Oh, but I have got used to that." And George Godolphin laughed: she spoke so simply and naturally.

"You will get used in time to this being your home, my darling."

Part 2. Chapter 1.

SIXTY POUNDS TO OLD JEKYL.

Standing on the covered terrace outside the dining-room at the Bank, in all the warm beauty of the late and lovely spring morning, surrounded by the perfume of flowers, the green lawn stretching out before her, the pleasant sitting-room behind her, its large window open and its paintings on the walls conspicuous, was Maria Godolphin. She wore a morning dress, simple and pretty as of yore, and her fair face had lost none of its beauty, scarcely any of its youth. Looking at her you would not think that a month had elapsed since she came there, to her home, after her marriage; and yet the time, since then, would not be counted by months, but by years. Six years and a half; it is, since her marriage took place, and the little girl, whom Maria is holding by the hand, is five years old. Just now Maria's face is all animation. She is talking to the child, and talking also to Jonathan and David Jekyl: but if you saw her at an unoccupied moment, her face in repose, you might detect an expression of settled sadness in it. It arose from the loss of her children. Three had died in succession, one after another; and this one, the eldest, was the only child remaining to her. A wondrously pretty little girl, her bare legs peeping between her frilled drawers and her white socks; with the soft brown eyes of her mother, and the golden Saxon curls of her father. With her mother's eyes the child had inherited her mother's gentle temperament: and Margery—who had found in her heart to leave Ashlydyat and become nurse to George's children—was wont to say that she never had to do with so sweet—tempered a child. She had been named Maria; but the name, for home use, had been corrupted into Meta: not to interfere with Maria's. She held her mother's hand, and, by dint of stretching up on her toes, could just bring her eyes above the marble top of the terrace balustrade.

"Donatan, why don't you get that big ting, to-day?"

Jonathan looked up, a broad smile on his face. He delighted in little children. He liked to hear them call him "Donatan: " and the little lady before him was as backward in the sound of the "th," as if she had been French. "She means the scythe, ma'am," said Jonathan.

"I know she does," said Maria. "The grass does not want mowing to-day, Meta. David, do you not think those rose-trees are very backward?"

David gave his usual grunt. "I should wonder if they were for'ard.

There ain't no rose-trees for miles round but what is back'ard, except them as have been nursed. With the cutting spring we've had, how are the rose-trees to get on, I'd like to know?"

Jonathan looked round, his face quite sunshine compared with David's his words also. "They'll come on famous now, ma'am, with this lovely weather. Ten days of it, and we shall have them all out in bloom. Little miss shall have a rare posy then, and I'll cut off the thorns first."

"A big one, mind, Donatan," responded the young lady, beginning to dance about in anticipation. The child had an especial liking for roses, which Jonathan remembered She inherited her mother's great love for flowers.

"David, how is your wife?" asked Maria.

"I've not heard that there's anything the matter with her," was David's phlegmatic answer, without lifting his face from the bed. He and Jonathan were both engaged almost at the same spot: David, it must be confessed, getting through more work than Jonathan.

They had kept that garden in order for Mr. Crosse, when the Bank was his residence. Also for Thomas Godolphin and his sisters, the little time they had lived there and afterwards for George. George had now a full complement of servants—rather more than a complement, indeed—and one of them might well have attended to that small garden. Janet had suggested as much: but easy George continued to employ the Jekyls. It was not often that the two attended together; as they were doing to-day.

"David," returned Maria, in answer to his remark, "I am sure you must know that your wife is often ailing. She is anything but strong. Only she is always merry and in good spirits, and so people think her better than she is. She is quite a contrast to you, David," Maria added, with a smile. "You don't talk and laugh much."

"Talking and laughing don't get on with a man's work, as ever I heerd on," returned David.

"Is it true that your father slipped yesterday, and sprained his ankle?" continued Maria. "I heard that he did."

"True enough," growled David.

"Twas all along of his good fortune, ma'am," said sunny Jonathan. "He was so elated with it that he slipped down Gaffer Thorpe's steps, where he was going to tell the news, and fell upon his ankle. The damage ain't of much account. But that's old father all over! Prime him up with a piece of good fortune, and be is all cock-a-hoop about it."

"What is the good fortune?" asked Maria.

"It's that money come to him at last, ma'am, what he had waited for so long. I'm sure we had all given it up for lost; and father stewed and fretted ever it, wondering always what was going to become of him in his old age. 'Tain't so very much, neither."

"Sixty pound is sixty pound," grunted David.

"Well, so it is," acquiesced Jonathan. "And father looks to it to make him more comfortable than he could be from his profits; his honey, and his garden, and that. He was like a child last night, ma'am, planning what he'd do with it. I told him he had better take care not to lose it."

"Let him bring it to the Bank," said Maria. "Tell him I say so, Jonathan. It will be safe here. He might be paid interest for it."

"I will, ma'am."

Maria spoke the words in good faith. Her mind had conjured up a vision of old Jekyl keeping his sixty pounds in his house, at the foot of some old stocking; and she thought how easily he might be robbed of it. "Yes, Jonathan, tell him to bring it here: don't let him keep it at home, to lose it."

Maria had another auditor, of whose presence she was unconscious. It was her mother. Mrs. Hastings had been admitted by a servant, and came through the room to the terrace unheard by Maria. The little girl's ears—like all children's—were quick, and she turned, and broke into a joyous cry of "Grandma!" Maria looked round.

"Oh, mamma! I did not know you were here. Are you quite well?" hastily added Maria, fancying that her mother looked dispirited.

"We have had news from Reginald this morning, and the news is not good," was the reply. "He has been getting into some disagreeable scrape over there, and it has taken a hundred pounds or two to clear him. Of course they came upon us for it."

Maria's countenance fell. "Reginald is very unlucky. He seems always to be getting into scrapes."

"He always is," said Mrs. Hastings. "We thought he could not get into mischief at sea: but it appears that he does. The ship was at Calcutta still, but they were expecting daily to sail for home."

"What is it that he has been doing?" asked Maria.

"I do not quite understand," replied Mrs. Hastings. "I saw his letter, but that was not very explanatory. What it chiefly contained were expressions of contrition, and promises of amendment. The captain wrote to your papa: and that letter he would not give me to read. Your papa's motive was a good one, no doubt,—to save me vexation. But, thy dear, he forgets that uncertainty causes the imagination to conjure up fears, worse, probably, than the reality"

"As Reginald grows older, he will grow steadier," remarked Maria. "And, mamma, whatever it may be, your grieving over it will not mend it."

"True," replied Mrs. Hastings. "But," she added, with a sad smile, "when your children shall be as old as mine, Maria, you will have learnt how impossible it is to a mother not to grieve. Have you forgotten the old saying? 'When our children are young they tread upon our toes; but when they are older they tread upon our hearts.'"

Little Miss Meta was treading upon her toes, just then. The child's tiny shoes were dancing upon grandmamma's in her eagerness to get close to her, to tell her that Donatan was going to give her a great big handful of roses, as soon as they were out, with the thorns cut off.

"Come to me, Meta," said Maria. She saw that her mamma was not in a mood to be troubled with children, and she drew the child on to her own knee. "Mamma, I am going for a drive presently," she continued. "Would it not do you good to accompany me?"

"I don't know that I could spare the time this morning," said Mrs. Hastings. "Are you going far?"

"I can go at or not, as you please," replied Marie. "We have a new carriage, and George told me at breakfast that I had better try it, and see how I liked it."

"A new carriage!" replied Mrs. Hastings, her accent betraying surprise. "Had you not enough carriages already, Maria?"

"In truth, I think we had, mamma. This new one is one that George took a fancy to when he was in London last week; and he bought it."

"Child—though of course it is no business of mine—you surely did not want it. What sort of carriage is it?"

"It is a large one: a sort of barouche. It will do you good to go out with me. I will order it at once, if you will do so, mamma."

Mrs. Hastings did not immediately reply. She appeared to have fallen into thought. Presently she raised her head and looked at Maria.

"My dear, I have long thought of mentioning to you a certain subject; and I think I will do so now. Strictly speaking, it is, as I say, no business of mine, but I cannot help being anxious for your interests."

Maria felt somewhat alarmed. It appeared a formidable preamble.

"I and your papa sometimes talk it over, one with another. And we say "—Mrs. Hastings smiled, as if to disarm her words of their serious import—" that we wish we could put old heads upon young shoulders. Upon yours and your husband's."

"But why?—in what way?" cried Maria.

"My dear, if you and he had old heads, you would, I think, see how very wrong it is—I speak the word only in your interests, Maria—to maintain so great and expensive an establishment. It must cost you and George, here, far more than it costs them at Ashlydyat."

"Yes, I suppose it does," said Maria.

"We do not know what your husband's income is—"

"I do not know, either," spoke Maria, for Mrs. Hastings had paused and looked at her, almost as though she would give opportunity for the information to be supplied. "George never speaks to me upon money matters or business affairs."

"Well, whatever it is," resumed Mrs. Hastings, "we should judge that he must be living up to every farthing of it. How much better it would be if you were to live more moderately, and put something by!"

"I dare say it would," acquiesced Maria. "To tell you the truth, mamma, there are times when I fall into a thoughtful mood, and feel half frightened at our expenditure. But then again I reflect that George knows his own affairs and his own resources far better than I do. The expense is of his instituting; not of mine."

"George is proverbially careless," significantly spoke Mrs. Hastings. But, mamma, if at the end of one year, he found his expense heavier than they ought to be, he would naturally retrench them the next. His not doing it proves that he can afford it."

I am not saying, or thinking, that he cannot afford it, Maria, in one sense; I do not suppose he outruns his income. But you might live at half your present expense and be quite as comfortable, perhaps more so. Servants, carriages, horses, dress, dinner-parties —I know you must spend enormously."

"Well, so we do," replied Maria. "But, mamma, you are perhaps unaware that George has an equal share with Thomas. He has indeed.

When Mr. Crosse retired, Thomas told George it should be so for the future."

"Did he? There are not many like Thomas Godolphin. Still, Maria, whatever may be your income, I maintain my argument, that you keep up unnecessary style and extravagance. Remember, my dear, that you had no marriage settlement. And, the more you save, the better for your children. You may have many yet."

"I think I will talk to George about it," mused Maria.

Of course the past seven years had not been without their changes. Mr. Crosse had retired from the Bank, and Thomas Godolphin, in his generosity, immediately constituted his brother an equal partner. He had not been so previously. Neither had it been contemplated by Sir George in his lifetime that it was so to be, yet awhile. The state maintained at Ashlydyat took more to keep it up than the quiet way in which it was supposed George would live at the Bank, and Thomas was the representative Godolphin. But Thomas Godolphin was incapable of any conduct bordering in the remotest degree upon covetousness or meanness: they were the sons of one father; and though there was the difference in their ages, and he was chief of the Godolphins, he made George's share equal to his own.

It was well perhaps that he did so. Otherwise George might have plunged into shoals and quicksands. He appeared to have no idea of living quietly: had he possessed the purse of Fortunatus, which was always full of gold, we are told, he could not have been much more careless of money. Rumour went, too, that all Mr. George's wild oats (bushels of which, you may remember to have heard, Prior's Ash gave him credit for) were not yet sown; and wild oats run away with a great deal of money. Perhaps the only person in all Prior's Ash who believed George Godolphin to be a saint, or next door to one, was Maria. Best that she should think so! But, extravagant as George was, a suspicion that he lived beyond his income, was never glanced at. Sober people, such as the Rector of All Souls' and Mrs. Hastings, would say in private what a pity it was that George did not think of saving for his family. Ample as the income, present and future,

arising from the Bank might be, it could not be undesirable to know that a nest-egg was accumulating. Thomas might have suggested this to George: gossips surmised that he did so, and that George let the suggestion go for nothing. They were wrong. Whatever lectures Janet may have seen well to give him, Thomas gave him none. Thomas was not one to interfere, or play the mentor: and Thomas had a strong silent conviction within him, that ere very long George would come into Ashlydyat. The conviction was born of his suspected state of health. He might be wrong; but he believed he was not. Ashlydyat George's; the double income from the Bank George's—where was the need to tell him to save now?

The Reverend Mr. Hastings had had some trouble with his boys: insomuch as that they had turned their faces against the career he had marked out for them. Isaac, the eldest, destined for the Church, had declined to qualify himself for it when he came to years of discretion. After some uncertainty, and what Mr., Hastings called "knocking about" —which meant that he was doing nothing when he ought to have been at work: and that state of affairs lasted for a year or two—Isaac won Maria over to his side. Maria, in her turn, won over George: and Isaac was admitted into the Bank. He held a good post in it now: the brother of Mrs. George Godolphin was not left to rise by chance or priority. A handsome young man of three and twenty was he; steady; and displaying an aptitude for business beyond his years. Many a one deemed that Isaac Hastings, in a worldly point of view, had done well in quitting the uncertain prospects offered by the Church, for a clerkship in the house of Godolphin. He might rise some time to be a partner in it. Reginald had also declined the career marked out for him. Some government appointment had been promised him: in fact, had been given him: but Reginald would hear of nothing but the sea. It angered Mr. Hastings much. One of the last men, was he, to force a boy into the Church; nay, to allow a boy to enter it, unless he showed a special liking for it; therefore Isaac had, on that score, got off pretty freely; but he was not one of the last men to force a boy to work, who displayed a taste for idleness. Reginald argued that he should lead a far more idle life in a government office, than he should have a chance of doing if he went to sea. He was right, so far. Mrs. Hastings had a special horror of the sea. Mothers, as a general rule, have. She set her face—and Mr. Hastings had also set his—against Reginald's sea visions; which, truth to say, had commenced with his earliest years.

However, Reginald and inclination proved too strong for opposition. The government post had to be declined with thanks; and to sea he went. Not into the navy: the boy had become too old for it: but into the merchant service. A good service, the firm he entered: but an expensive one. The premium was high; the outfit was large; the yearly sum that went in expenses while he was what is called a midshipman was considerable. But he quitted that service in a pique, and had since been trying different ships on his own account. Altogether, Mr. Hastings had trouble with him. Harry was keeping his first term at College. He had chosen the Church of his own free will: and was qualifying for it. Grace was married. And Rose was growing up to be as pretty as Maria.

"Maria," said Mrs. Hastings, "if I am to go out with you to-day, why should we not call upon Mrs. Averil? I have wanted to see her for some time."

"I will call with pleasure," was Maria's answer. "As well take a long drive as a short one. Then we should start at once."

She rang the bell as she spoke. To order the carriage, and for Margery to come for Miss Meta. The latter, who had played the trick before, suddenly broke from Margery, and dashed into the Bank parlour. She had learned to open the door.

George by good luck happened to be alone. He affected great anger, and Margery also scolded sharply. George had been sitting at a table, bending over account books, his spirit weary, his brow knit. His assumed anger was wasted: for he caught up the child the next moment and covered her face with kisses. Then he carried her into the dining-room to Maria,

"What am I to do with this naughty child, mamma? She came bursting in upon me like a great fierce lion. I must buy a real lion and keep him in the closet, and let him loose if she does it again. Meta won't like to be eaten up."

Meta laughed confidentially. "Papa won't let a lion eat Meta."

"You saucy child!" But George's punishment consisted only of more kisses.

"Is Meta going with you?" asked George, when Maria told him of the contemplated visit to Mrs. Averil.

Meta interposed. "Yes, she should go," she said.

"If I take Meta, I must take you also, Margery," observed Maria. "I cannot have the trouble of her in the carriage."

"I shan't hinder time," was Margery's response. "My bonnet and shawl's soon put on, ma'am. Come along, child. I'll dress you at once."

She went off with Meta, waiting for no further permission. George stepped out on the terrace, to see what Jonathan and David were about. Maria took the opportunity to tell him of the sixty pounds which had come to old Jekyl, and that she had advised its being brought to the Bank to be taken care of.

"What money is it? Where does it come from?" inquired George of the men.

"It's the money, sir, as was left to father this three years ago, from that dead uncle of ourn," returned Jonathan. "But the lawyers, sir, they couldn't agree, and it was never paid over. Now there has been a trial over it, something about the will; and father has had notice that it's ready for him, all the sixty pound."

"We will take care of it for him, and pay him interest, tell him, if he chooses to leave it here," said George.

"I'll tell him, sure enough, sir. He's safe to bring it."

The carriage was at the door in due course, and they were ready. A handsome carriage; acknowledged to be so by even Mrs. Hastings. George came out to hand them in. Miss Meta, a pretty little dressed-up fairy; Margery, plain and old-fashioned; Mrs. Hastings, quiet and ladylike; Maria, beautiful. Her hand lingered in her husband's.

"I wish you were coming, George," she bent from the carriage to whisper.

"I am too busy to-day, my dearest."

Although nearly seven years a wife, the world still contained no idol for Maria like George Godolphin. She loved, respected, revered him. Nothing, as yet, had shaken her faith in her husband. The little tales, making free with Mr. George's name, which would now and then be flying about Prior's Ash, had never reached the ears of Maria.

They had a seven-mile drive. The Honourable Mrs. Averil, who was growing in years, and had become an invalid, was delighted to see them. She kept them for two or three hours, and wanted to keep them for the day. It was late in the afternoon when they returned to Prior's Ash.

They met a cavalcade on entering the town. A riding-party, consisting of several ladies and one or two gentlemen, followed by some grooms. Somewhat apart from the rest, midway between the party and the grooms, rode two abreast, laughing, animated; upon the best of terms with each other. The lady sat her horse unusually well. She was slightly larger, but not a whit less handsome, than on the day you first saw her at the meet of the hounds: Charlotte Pain. He, gay George—for it was no other—was riding carelessly, half turning on his horse, his fair curls bending towards Charlotte.

"Papa! papa!" shrieked out Meta, joyously.

George turned hastily, but the carriage had then passed. So occupied had he been in making himself agreeable that he had positively not seen it. Charlotte had. Charlotte had bowed. Bowed to Maria with a look of cool assurance, of triumph—as much as to say, You are sitting alone, and your husband is with me. At least, it might have worn that appearance to one given to flights of fancy, which Maria was not; and she returned the bow with a pleasant smile. She caught George's eye when he turned, and a flush of pleasure lighted her face. George nodded to her cordially, and raised his hat, sending back a smile at the idea of his not having seen her.

"It was papa, was it not, darling!" said Maria, gleefully, bending over to her little girl.

But Maria did not notice that Margery's head had given itself a peculiar toss at sight of George's companion; or that a severe expression had crossed the face of Mrs. Hastings. An expression which she instantly smoothed away, lest Maria should see it.

The fact was, that gossiping Prior's Ash had for some time coupled together the names of George Godolphin and Charlotte Pain in its usual free manner. No need, one would think, for Mrs. Hastings or Margery to give heed to such tattle: for they knew well what the stories of Prior's Ash were worth.

Part 2. Chapter 2.

WHY DID IT ANGER HIM?

The drawing-rooms at Lady Godolphin's Folly were teeming with light, with noise, with company. The Verralls lived in it still. Lady Godolphin had never given them their dismissal: but they did not spend so much time in it as formerly. London, or elsewhere, appeared to claim them for the greater portion of the year. One year they did not come to it at all. Sometimes only Mrs. Verrall would be sojourning at it; her husband away: indeed, their residence there was most irregular. Mrs. Verrall was away at present: it was said at the seaside.

A dinner-party had taken place that day. A gentleman's party. It was not often that Mr. Verrall gave one: but when he did so it was thoroughly well done. George Godolphin did not give better dinners than did Mr. Verrall. The only promised guest who had failed in his attendance was Thomas Godolphin. Very rarely indeed did he accept invitations to the Folly. If there was one man in all the county to whom Mr. Verrall seemed inclined to pay court, to treat with marked consideration and respect, that man was Thomas Godolphin. Thomas almost always declined; declined courteously; in a manner which could not afford the slightest loophole for offence. He was of quiet habits, not strong in health of late, and though he had to give dinner-parties himself, and attended some of George's in the way of business, his friends were nearly all kind enough to excuse his frequenting theirs in return.

This time, however, Thomas Godolphin had yielded to Mr. Verrall's pressing entreaties, made in person, and promised to be present. A promise which was not—as it proved—to be kept. All the rest of the guests had assembled, and they were only waiting the appearance of Mr. Godolphin to sit down, when a hasty note arrived from Janet. Mr. Godolphin had been taken ill in dressing, and was utterly unable to attend. So they dined without him.

Dinner was over now. And the guests, most of them, had gone to the drawing-rooms; teeming, I say, with light, with the hum of many voices—with heat. A few had gone home; a few had taken cigars and were strolling outside the dining-room windows in the moonlight: some were taking coffee; and some were flirting with Charlotte Pain.

Mrs. Pain now, you remember. But Charlotte has worn weeds for her husband since you last saw her, and is free again. About four years after their marriage, the death of Rodolf Pain appeared in the county papers. None of the Verralls were at the Folly at the time but Charlotte in her widow's dress came to it almost immediately afterwards, to sob out her sorrow in retirement. Charlotte emerged from her widowhood gayer than before. She rode more horses, she kept more dogs, she astonished Prior's Ash with her extraordinary modes of attire, she was altogether "faster" than ever. Charlotte had never once visited the neighbourhood during her married life; but she appeared to be inclined to make up for it now, for she chiefly stayed in it. When the Verralls, one or both, would be away, Charlotte remained at the Folly, its mistress. She held her court; she gave entertainments; she visited on her own score. Rumour went that Mrs. Pain had been left very well off: and that she shared with Mr. Verrall the expense of the Folly.

Charlotte managed to steer tolerably clear of ill-natured tongues. Latterly, indeed, people had got to say that Mr. George Godolphin was at the Folly more than he need be. But, it was certain that George and Mr. Verrall were upon most intimate terms: and Mr. Verrall had been staying at the Folly a good deal of late. George of course would have said that his visits there were paid to Mr. Verrall. Charlotte was popular in the neighbourhood, rather than otherwise; with the ladies as well as with the gentlemen.

Resplendent is Charlotte to-night, in a white silk dress with silver spots upon it. It is a really beautiful dress: but one of a quieter kind would have been more suited to this occasion. Charlotte had not appeared at dinner, and there was not the least necessity for embellishing herself in this manner to receive them in the drawing-room. Charlotte was one, however, who did as she pleased; in the matter of dress, as in other things, setting custom and opinion at defiance. Her hair is taken from her face and wound round and round her head artistically, in conjunction with a white and silver wreath. White and silver ornaments are on her neck and arms, and a choice bouquet of white hot-house flowers serves her to toy with. Just now, however, the bouquet is discarded, and lies on the table near her elbow, for her elbow is resting there as she sits. She is coquetting with a white and silver fan, gently wafting it before her face; her sparkling eyes glancing over its rim at a gentleman, who stands, coffee-cup in hand, bending down to her.

It is not George Godolphin. So do not let your imagination run off to him. For all the world saw, George and Charlotte were as decorous in behaviour with each other as need be: and where Prior's Ash was picking up its ill-natured scandal from, Prior's Ash best knew. Others talked and laughed with Charlotte as much as George did; rode with her, admired her.

The gentleman, bending down to her now, appears to admire her. A tall, handsome man of eight-and-thirty years, with clearly-cut features, and dark luminous eyes. He is the nephew of that Mrs. Averil to whom Maria and Mrs. Hastings went to pay a visit. He has been away from the neighbourhood, until recently, for nearly three years; and this is the first time he has seen Charlotte at Prior's Ash since she was Mrs. Pain.

What does Charlotte promise herself by thus flirting with him— by laying out her charms to attract him?—as she is evidently doing. Is she thinking to make a second marriage? to win him, as she once thought to win George Godolphin? Scarcely. One gentleman in the vicinity, who had thrown himself and his fortune at Charlotte's feet— and, neither fortune nor gentleman could be reckoned despicable—had been rejected with an assurance that she would never marry again; and she spoke it with an earnestness that left no doubt of her sincerity. Charlotte liked her own liberty too well. She was no doubt perfectly aware that every husband would not feel inclined to accord it to her as entirely as had poor Rodolf Pain. He—the one with the coffee-cup in hand, talking to her—is plunging into a sea of blunders. As you may hear, if you listen to what he is saying

"Yes, I have come back to find many things changed," he was observing; "things and people. Time, though but a three years' flight, leaves its mark behind it, Mrs. Pain. If you will allow me to remark it, I would say that you are almost the only one whom it has not changed—except for the better."

"Your lordship has not lost your talent for flattery, I perceive" was Charlotte's rejoinder.

"Nay, but I speak no flattery; I mean what I say," was the peer's reply, given in an earnest spirit. He was an admirer of beauty; he admired Charlotte's: but to flatter was not one of the failings of Lord Averil. Neither had he any ulterior object in view, save- that of

passing ten minutes of the evening agreeably with Charlotte's help, ere he took his departure. If Charlotte thought he had, she was mistaken. Lord Averil's affections and hopes were given to one very different from Charlotte Pain.

"But it must be considerably more than three years since I saw you," resumed Lord Averil. "It must be—I should think—nearer seven. You did not return to Prior's Ash—if I remember rightly—after you left it on your marriage."

"I did not return to it," replied Charlotte: "but you have seen me since then, Lord Averil. Ah! your memory is treacherous. Don't you recollect accosting me in Rotten Row? It was soon after, you lost your wife."

Did Charlotte intend that as a shaft? Lord Averil's cheek burnt as he endeavoured to recall the reminiscence. "I think I remember it," he slowly said. "It was just before I went abroad. Yes, I do remember it," he added, after a pause. "You were riding with a young, fair man. And—did you not—really I beg your pardon if I am wrong—did you not introduce him to me as Mr. Pain?"

"It was Mr. Pain," replied Charlotte.

I hope he is well. He is not here probably? I did not see him at table, I think."

Charlotte's face—I mean its complexion—was got up in the fashion. But the crimson that suffused it would have penetrated all the powder and cosmetics extant, let them have been laid on ever so profusely. She was really agitated: could not for the time speak. Another moment, and she turned deadly pale. Let us admire her, at any rate, for this feeling shown to her departed husband.

"My husband is dead, Lord Averil."

Lord Averil felt shocked at his blunder. "You must forgive me," he said in a gentle voice, his tone, his manner, showing the deepest sympathy. "I had no idea of it. No one has mentioned it to me since my return. The loss, I infer, cannot be a very recent one?"

In point of fact, Mr. Pain's demise had occurred immediately after the departure of Lord Averil from England. Charlotte is telling him so. It could not, she thinks, have been more than a week or two subsequent to it.

"Then he could not have been ill long," remarked his lordship. "What was the cause—"

"Oh pray do not make me recall it!" interrupted Charlotte in a tone of pain. "He died suddenly: but—it was altogether very distressing. Distressing to me, and distressing in its attendant circumstances."

An idea flashed over the mind of Lord Averil that the circumstances of the death must have been peculiar: in short, that Mr. Pain might have committed suicide. If he was wrong, Charlotte's manner was to blame. It was from that he gathered the thought. That the subject was a most unwelcome one, there could be no doubt; she palpably shrank from it.

Murmuring again a few clear words of considerate apology, Lord Averil changed the conversation, and presently said adieu to Charlotte.

"You surely are not thinking of going yet?" cried Charlotte, retaining his hand, and recovering all her lightness of manner. "They are setting out the whist-tables."

"I do not play. I have a visit to pay yet to a sick friend," he added, glancing at his watch. "I shall still be in time."

"But I do not think your carriage is here," urged Charlotte, who would fain have detained him.

"I am ~~so~~ sure it is not here," was the peer's answer. "I did not order it to come for me. It is a fine night, and I shall walk to Prior's Ash."

He looked round for Mr. Verrall. He could not see him. In at one room, in at another, looked he; out upon the terrace, before the dining-room window, amidst the smokers. But there was no Mr. Verrall: and Lord Averil, impatient to be gone, finally departed without wishing his host good night.

Mr. Verrall had strolled out into the moonlight, and was in low, earnest conversation with George Godolphin. They had got as far as that stream on which you saw George rowing the day of Mrs. Verrall's Se, when he so nearly caught his death. Standing on the arched wooden bridge, which crossed it to the mock island, they leaned forward, their arms on the rails. Mr. Verrall was smoking; George Godolphin appeared to be too ill at ease to smoke. His brow was knit; his face hot with care. As fast as he wiped the drops from his brow they gathered there again.

"Don't worry, lad," said Mr. Verrall. "It always has come right, and it will come right now. Never fear. You will receive news from London to-morrow; there's little doubt of it."

"But it ought to have come to-day, Verrall." -

"It will come to-morrow, safe enough. And—you know that you may always count upon me."

"I know I may. But look at the awful cost, Verrall."

"Pooh, pooh! What has put you in this mood to-night?"

"I don't know," said George, wiping the damp from his brow. "Not hearing from town, I think. Verrall!"

"What?"

"Suppose, when I do hear, it should not be favourable? I feel in a fever when I think of it."

"You took too much of that heating port this evening," said Mr. Verrall.

"I dare say I did," returned George. "A man at ease may let the wine pass him: but one worried to death is glad of it to drown care."

"Worried to death I" repeated Mr. Verrall in a reproving tone.

"Next door to it. Look there! They have tracked us and are coming in search."

Two or three dark forms were discerned in the distance, nearer the Folly. Mr. Verrall passed his arm within George Godolphin's and led him towards the house."

"I think I'll go home," said George. "I am not company for a dog to-night"

"Nonsense," said Mr. Verrall. "The tables are ready. I want to give you your revenge."

For once in his life—and it was a notable exception—George Godolphin actually resisted the temptation of the "tables;" the chance of "revenge." He had a heavy trouble upon him; a great fear; perhaps more than Mr. Verrall knew of. Ay, he had! But who would have suspected it of gay, careless George, who had been so brilliant at the dinner-table? He forswore for that one night the attractions of the Folly, including syren Charlotte, and went straight home.

It was not much past ten when he reached the Bank. Maria was astonished: the Verrall dinner-parties were generally late affairs. She was sitting alone, reading. In her glad surprise she ran to him with an exclamation of welcome.

George pressed her tenderly to him, and his manner was gay and careless again. Whatever scandal Prior's Ash might choose to talk of George, he had not yet begun to neglect his wife.

"It was rather humdrum, darling, and I got tired," he said in answer to her questions. "What have you been doing with yourself? Have you been alone all the evening?"

"Since mamma left. She went home after tea. George, I want to tell you something mamma has been talking of; has been suggesting."

George stretched himself on the sofa, as if he were weary. Maria edged herself on to it, and sat facing him, holding his hand while she talked.

"It was the new carriage that brought the subject up, George. Mamma introduced it this morning. She says we are living at too great an expense; that we ought not to spend more than half as much as we do—"

"What?" shouted George, starting up from the sofa as if he had been electrified.

Maria felt electrified; electrified by the sudden movement, the word, the tone of anger. Nay, it was not anger alone that it bore, but dismay; fear—she could hardly tell what sound. "George," she gasped, "what is the matter?"

"Tell me what it is that Mrs. Hastings has been saying?"

"George, I think you must have mistaken my words," was all that Maria could reply in the first moment, feeling truly uncomfortable. "Mamma said this morning that it was a pity we did not live at less expense, and save money; that it would be desirable for the sake of Meta and any other children we may have. I said I thought it would be desirable, and that I would suggest it to you. That was all."

George gazed at Maria searchingly for the space of a minute or two. "Has Prior's Ash been saying this?"

"Oh no."

"Good. Tell Mrs. Hastings, Maria, that we are capable of managing our own affairs without interference. I do not desire it, nor will I admit it."

Maria sat down to the table with her book; the one she had been reading when George came in. She put up her hands, as if absorbed in reading, but her tears were falling. She had never had an ill word with her husband; had never had any symptom of estrangement with him; and she could not bear this. George lay on the sofa, his lips compressed. Maria rose, in her loving, affectionate nature, and stood before him.

"George, I am sure mamma never meant to interfere; she would not do such a thing. What she said arose from anxiety for our interests. I am so sorry to have offended you," she added, the tears falling fast.

A repentant fit had come over him. He drew his wife's face down on his own and kissed its tears away. "Forgive me, my dearest; I was wrong to speak crossly to you. A splitting headache has put me out

of sorts, and I was vexed to hear that people were commenting on our private affairs. Nothing could annoy me half so much."

Maria wondered why. But she fully resolved that it should be the last time she would hint at such a thing as economy. Of course her husband knew his own business best.

Part 2. Chapter 3.

CECIL'S ROMANCE

We must turn to Ashlydyat, and go back to a little earlier in the evening. Miss Godolphin's note to the Folly had stated that her brother had been taken ill while dressing for Mr. Verrall's dinner-party. It was correct. Thomas Godolphin was alone in his room, ready, when he was attacked by a sharp internal paroxysm of agony. He hastily sat down: a cry escaped his lips, and drops of water gathered on his brow.

Alone he bore it, calling for no aid. In a few minutes the pain had partially passed, and he rang for his servant. An old man now, that servant: he had for years attended on Sir George Godolphin.

"Bexley, I have been ill again," said Thomas, quietly. "Will you ask Miss Godolphin to write a line to Mr. Verrall, saying that I am unable to attend."

Bexley cast a strangely yearning look on the pale, suffering face of his master. He had seen him in these paroxysms once or twice. "I wish you would have Mr. Snow called in, sir!" he cried.

"I think I shall. He may give me some ease, possibly. Take my message to your mistress, Bexley."

The effect of the message was to bring Janet to the room, "Taken ill! a sharp inward pain!" she was repeating, after Bexley. "Thomas, what sort of a pain is it? It seems to me that you have had the same before lately."

"Write a few words the first thing, will you, Janet? I should not like to keep them waiting for me."

Janet, punctilious as Thomas, considerate as he was for others, sat down and wrote the note, despatching it at once by Andrew, one of the serving men. Few might have set about and done it so calmly as Janet, considering that she had a great fear thumping at her heart. A fear which had never penetrated it until this moment. With something very like sickness, had flashed into her memory their

mother's pain. A sharp, agonizing pain had occasionally attacked her, the symptom of the inward malady of which she had died. Was the same fatal malady attacking Thomas? The doctors had expressed their fears then that it might prove hereditary.

In the corridor, as Janet was going back to Thomas's room, the note despatched, she encountered Bexley. The sad apprehensive look in the old man's face struck her. She touched his arm, and beckoned him into an empty room.

What is it that is the matter with your master?"

"I don't know," was the answer: but the words were spoken in a tone which caused Janet to think that the old man was awake to the same fears that she was. "Miss Janet, I am afraid to think what it may be."

"Is he often ill like this?"

"I know but of a time or two, ma'am. But that's a time or two too many."

Janet returned to the room. Thomas was leaning back in his chair, his face ghastly, his hands fallen, prostrate altogether from the effects of the agony. Things were coming into her mind one by one: how much time Thomas had spent in his own room of late; how seldom, comparatively speaking, he went to the Bank; how often he had the brougham, instead of walking, when he did go to it. Once—why, it was only this very last Sunday!—he had not gone near church all day long. Janet's fears grew into certainties.

She took a chair, drawing it nearer to Thomas. Not speaking of her fears, but asking him in a soothing tone how he felt, and what had caused his illness. "Have you had the same pain before?" she continued.

"Several times," he answered. "But it has been worse to-night than I have previously felt it. Janet, I fear it may be the forerunner of my call. I did not think to leave you so soon."

Except that Janet's face went almost as pale as his, and that her fingers entwined themselves together so tightly as to cause pain, there was no outward sign of the grief that laid hold of her heart.

"Thomas, what is the complaint that you are fearing?" she asked, after a pause. "The same that—that—"

"That my mother had," he quietly answered, speaking the words that Janet would not speak.

"It may not be so," gasped Janet.

"True. But I think it is."

"Why have you never spoken of this?"

"Because, until to-night, I have doubted whether it was so, or not. A suspicion, that it might be so, certainly was upon me: but it amounted to no more than suspicion. At times, when I feel quite well, I argue that I must be wrong."

"Have you consulted Mr. Snow?"

"I am going to do so now. I have desired Bexley to send for him."

"It should have been done before, Thomas."

"Why? If it is as I suspect, neither Snow nor all his brethren can save me."

Janet clasped her hands upon her knee, and sat with her head bent. She was feeling the communication in all its bitter force. It seemed that the only one left on earth with whom she could sympathize was Thomas: and now perhaps he was going! Bessy, George, Cecil, all were younger, all had their own pursuits and interests; George had his new ties; but she and Thomas seemed to stand alone. With the deep sorrow for him, the brother whom she dearly loved, came other considerations, impossible not to occur to a practical, foreseeing mind such as Janet's. With Thomas they should lose Ashlydyat. George would come into possession: and George's ways were so different from theirs, that it would seem to be no longer in the

family. What would George make of it? A gay, frequented place, as the Verralls—when they were at home—made of Lady Godolphin's Folly? Janet's cheeks flushed at the idea of such degeneracy for stately Ashlydyat. However it might be, whether George turned it into an ever-open house, or shut it up as a nunnery, it would be alike lost to all the rest of them. She and her sisters must turn from it once again and for ever; George, his wife, and his children, would reign there.

Janet Godolphin did not rebel at this; she would not have had it otherwise. Failing Thomas, George was the fit and proper representative of Ashlydyat. But the fact could but strike upon her now with gloom. All things wore a gloomy hue to her in that unhappy moment.

It would cause changes at the Bank, too. At least, Janet thought it probable that it might do so. Could George carry on that extensive concern himself? Would the public be satisfied with gay George for its sole head?—would they accord him the confidence they had given Thomas? These old retainers, too! If she and her sisters quitted Ashlydyat, they must part with them: leave them to serve George.

Such considerations passed rapidly through her imagination. It could not well be otherwise. Would they really come to pass? She looked at Thomas, as if seeking in his face the answer to the doubt

His elbow on the arm of his chair, and his temples pressed upon his hand, sat Thomas; his mind in as deep a reverie as Janet's. Where was it straying to? To the remembrance of Ethel?—of the day that he had stood over her grave when they were placing her in it? Had the time indeed come, or nearly come, to which he had, from that hour, looked forward?—the time of his joining her? He had never lost the vision: and perhaps the fiat, death, could have come to few who would meet it so serenely as Thomas Godolphin. It would scarcely be right to say welcome it; but, certain it was that the prospect was one of pleasantness rather than of pain to him. To one who has lived near to God on earth, the anticipation of the great change can bring no dismay. It brought none to Thomas Godolphin.

But Thomas Godolphin had not done with earth and its cares yet.

Bessy Godolphin was away from home that week. She had gone to spend it with some friends at a few miles' distance. Cecil was alone when Janet returned to the drawing-room. She had no suspicion of the sorrow that was overhanging the house. She had not seen Thomas go to the Folly, and felt surprised at his tardiness.

"How late he will be, Janet!"

"Who? Thomas! He is not going. He is not very well this evening," was the reply.

Cecil thought nothing of it. How should she? Janet buried her fears within her, and said no more.

One was to dine at Lady Godolphin's Folly that night, who absorbed all Cecil's thoughts. Cecil Godolphin had had her romance in life; as so many have it. It had been partially played out years ago. Not quite. Its sequel had still to come. She sat there listlessly; her pretty hands resting inertly on her knee, her beautiful face tinged with the setting sunlight; sat there thinking of him—Lord Averil.

A romance it had really been. Cecil Godolphin had paid a long visit to the Honourable Mrs. Averil, some three or four year's ago. She, Mrs. Averil, was in health then, fond of gaiety, and her house had many visitors. Amidst others, staying there, was Lord Averil: and before he and Cecil knew well what they were about, they had learned to love each other. Lord Averil was the first to awake from the pleasant dream: to know what it meant; and, he discreetly withdrew himself out of harm's way. Harm only to himself; as he supposed: he never suspected that the same love had won its way to Cecil Godolphin. A strictly honourable man, he would have been ready to kill himself in self-condemnation had he suspected that it had. Not until he had gone, did it come out to Cecil that he was a married man. When only eighteen years of age he had been drawn into one of those unequal and unhappy alliances that can only bring a flush to the brow in after-years. Many a hundred times had it dyed that of Lord Averil. Before he was twenty years of age, he had separated from his wife; when pretty Cecil was yet a child: and the next ten years he had spent abroad, striving to outlive its remembrance. His own family, you may be sure, did not pain him by alluding to it, then, or after his return. He had no residence now in the neighbourhood of Prior's Ash: he had sold it years ago. When he

visited the spot, it was chiefly as the guest of Colonel Max, the master of the fox-hounds: and in that way he had made the acquaintance of Charlotte Pain. Thus it happened, when Cecil met him at Mrs. Averil's, that she knew nothing of his being a married man. On Mrs. Averil's part, she never supposed that Cecil did not know it. Lord Averil supposed she knew it: and little enough in his own eyes has he looked in her presence, when the thought would flash over him, "How she must despise me for my mad folly!" He had learned to love her; to love her passionately: never so much as glancing at the thought that it could be reciprocated. He, a married man! But this folly was no less mad than the other had been, and Lord Averil had the sense to remove himself from it.

A day or two after his departure, Mrs. Averil received a letter from him. Cecil was in her dressing-room when she read it.

"How strange!" was the comment of Mrs. Averil. "What do you think, Cecil?" she added, lowering her voice. "When he reached town there was a communication waiting for him at his house, saying that his wife was dying, and praying him to go and see her."

"His wife?" echoed Cecil. "Whose wife?"

"Lord Averil's. Have you forgotten that he had a wife? I wish we could all really forget it. It has been the blight of his life."

Cecil had discretion enough left in that unhappy moment not to betray that she had been ignorant of the fact. When her burning cheeks had a little cooled, she turned from the window where she had been hiding them, and escaped to her own room. The revelation had betrayed to her the secret of her own feelings for Lord Averil; and in her pride and rectitude, she thought she should have died.

A day or two more, and Lord Averil was a widower. He suffered - some months to elapse, and then came to Prior's Ash, his object being

Cecil Godolphin. He stayed at an hotel, and was a frequent visitor at Ashlydyat. Cecil believed that he meant to ask her to be his wife; and Cecil was not wrong. She could give herself up now to the full joy of loving him.

Busy tongues, belonging to some young ladies who boasted more wit than discretion, hinted something of this to Cecil. Cecil, in her vexation at having her private feelings suspected, spoke slightly of Lord Averil. "Did they think she would stoop to a widower; to one who had made himself so notorious by his first marriage?" she asked. And this, word for word, was repeated to Lord Averil.

It was repeated to him by those false friends, and Cecil's haughty manner, as she spoke it, offensively commented upon. Lord Averil fully believed it. He judged that he had no chance with Cecil Godolphin; and, without speaking to her of what had been his intentions, he again left.

But now, no suspicion of this conversation having been repeated to him, ever reached Cecil. She deemed his behaviour very bad. Whatever restraint he may have placed upon his manner towards her, when at Mrs. Averil's, he had been open enough since: and Cecil could only believe his conduct unjustifiable—the result of fickleness. She resolved to forget him.

But she had not done so yet. All this long time since, nearly three years, had Cecil been trying to do it, and it was not yet accomplished. She had received an offer from a young and handsome earl; it would have been a match in every way desirable: but poor Cecil found that Lord Averil was too deeply seated in her heart for her to admit thought of another. And now Lord Averil was back again at Prior's Ash; and, as Cecil had heard, was to dine that day at Lady Godolphin's Folly. He had called at Ashlydyat since his return, but she was out.

She sat there, thinking of him: her feeling against him chiefly that of anger. She believed to this hour that he had used her ill; that his behaviour had been unbecoming a gentleman.

Her reflections were disturbed by the appearance of Mr. Snow. It was growing dusk then, and she wondered what brought him there so late: in fact, what brought him there at all. She turned and asked the question of Janet.

"He has come to see Thomas," replied Janet. And Cecil noticed that her sister was sitting in a strangely still attitude, her head bowed

down. But she did not connect it with its true cause. It was nothing unusual to see Janet lost in deep thought.

"What is the matter with Thomas, that Mr. Snow should come now?" inquired Cecil.

"He did not feel well, and sent for him."

It was all that Janet answered. And Cecil continued in blissful ignorance of anything being wrong, and resumed her reflections on Lord Averil.

Janet saw Mr. Snow before he went away. Afterwards she went to Thomas's room, and remained in it. Cecil stayed in the drawing-room, buried in her dream. The room was lighted, but the blinds were not drawn: Cecil was at the window, looking out into the bright moonlight.

It must have been growing quite late when she discerned some one approaching Ashlydyat, on the road from Lady Godolphin's Folly.

From the height she fancied at first that it might be George; but as the figure drew nearer, her heart gave a bound, and she saw that it was he upon whom her thoughts had been fixed.

Yes, it was Lord Averil. When he mentioned to Charlotte Pain that he had a visit yet to pay to a sick friend, he had alluded to Thomas Godolphin. Lord Averil, since his return, had been struck with the change in Thomas Godolphin. It was more perceptible to him than to those who saw Thomas habitually. And when the apology came for Mr. Godolphin's absence, Lord Averil determined to call upon him that night. Though, in talking to Mrs. Pain, he almost let the time for it slip by.

Cecil rose up when he entered. In broad daylight he might have seen beyond doubt her changing face, telling of emotion. Was he mistaken, in fancying that she was agitated? His pulses quickened at the thought: for Cecil was as dear to him as she had ever been.

"Will you pardon my intrusion at this hour?" he asked, taking her hand, and bending towards her with his sweet smile. "It is later than I thought it was"—in truth, ten was striking that moment from the

hall clock. "I was concerned to hear of Mr. Godolphin's illness, and wished to ascertain how he was, before returning to Prior's Ash."

"He has kept his room this evening," replied Cecil. "My sister is sitting with him. I do not think it is anything serious. But he has not appeared very well of late."

"Indeed I trust it is nothing serious," warmly responded Lord Averil.

Cecil fell into silence. She supposed they had told Janet of the visit, and that she would be coming in. Lord Averil went to the window.

"The same charming scene!" he exclaimed. "I think the moonlight view from this window most beautiful. The dark trees, and the white walls of Lady Godolphin's Folly, rising there, remain on my memory as a painted scene."

He folded his arms and stood there, gazing still. Cecil stole a look up at him: at his pale, attractive face, with its expression of care. She had wondered once why that look of care should be conspicuous there; but not after she became acquainted with his domestic history.

"Have you returned to England to remain, Lord Averil?"

The question awoke him from his reverie. He turned to Cecil, and a sudden impulse prompted him to stake his fate on the die of the moment. It was not a lucky throw.

"I would remain if I could induce one to share my name and home. Forgive me, Cecil, if I anger-you by thus hastily speaking. Will you forget the past, and help me to forget it?—will you let me make you my dear wife?"

In saying "Will you forget the past," Lord Averil had alluded to his first marriage. In his extreme sensitiveness upon that point, he doubted whether Cecil might not object to succeed the dead Lady Averil: he believed those hasty and ill-natured words, reported to him as having been spoken by her, bore upon that sore point alone. Cecil, on the contrary, assumed that her forgetfulness was asked for his own behaviour to her, in so far as that he had gone away and left her without word or explanation. She grew quite pale with anger. Lord Averil resumed, his manner earnest, his voice low and tender.

"I have loved you, Cecil, from the first day that I saw you at Mrs. Averil's. I dragged myself away from the place, because I loved you, fearing lest you might come to see my folly. It was worse than folly then, for I was not a free man. I have gone on loving you more and more, from that time to this. I went abroad this last time hoping to forget you; striving to forget you, but I cannot do it, and the love has only become stronger. Forgive, I say, my urging it upon you in this moment's impulse."

Poor Cecil was all at sea. "Went abroad, hoping to forget her; striving to forget her!" It was worse and worse. She flung his hand away. -

"Oh, Cecil! can you not love me?" he exclaimed in agitation. "Will you not give me hope that you will sometime be my wife?"

"No, I cannot love you. I will not give you hope. I would rather marry any one in the world than you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Lord Averil!"

Not a very dignified rejoinder. And Cecil, what with anger, what with love, burst into even less dignified tears, and left the room in a passion. Lord Averil bit his lips to pain.

Janet entered, unsuspecting. He turned from the window, and smoothed his brow, gathering what equanimity he could, as he proceeded to inquire after Mr. Godolphin.

Part 2. Chapter 4.

CHARLOTTE PAIN'S "TURN-OUT."

A stylish vehicle, high enough for a fire-escape, its green wheels picked out with gleaming red, was dashing up the streets of Prior's Ash. A lady was seated in it, driving its pair of blood-horses, whose restive mettle appeared more fitted for a man's guidance than a woman's. You need not be told that it was Charlotte Pain; no one else of her sex in Prior's Ash would have driven such a turn-out. Prior's Ash, rather at a loss what name to give it, for the like of it had never been seen in that sober place, christened it "Mrs. Pain's turnout:" so, if you grumble at the appellation, you must grumble at them, not at me.

Past the Bank it flew; when, as if a sudden thought appeared to take the driver, it suddenly whirled round, to the imminent danger of the street in general, retraced its steps past the Bank, dashed round the corner of Crosse Street, and drew up at the entrance to Mr. George Godolphin's. The servant sprang from the seat behind.

"Inquire if Mrs. George Godolphin is within."

Mrs. George Godolphin was within, and Charlotte entered. Across the hail, up the handsome staircase lined with paintings, to the still more handsome drawing-room, swept she, conducted by a servant. Margery looked out at an opposite door, as Charlotte entered that of the drawing-room, her curious eyes taking in at a glance Charlotte's attire. Charlotte wore a handsome mauve brocaded skirt, trailing the ground at the very least half a yard behind her, and a close habit of mauve velvet. A black hat with a turned-up brim, and a profusion of mauve feathers, adorned her head, and a little bit of gauze, mauve-coloured also, came half-way down her face, fitting tightly round the nose and cheeks. At that period, this style of dress was very uncommon.

Margery retired with a sniff. Had it been any one she approved, any especial friend of her mistress, she would have invited her into her mistress's presence, to the little boudoir, where Maria was seated. A pretty boudoir, tastefully furnished. The bedroom, dressing-room, and this boudoir communicated with each other. Being who it was,

Margery allowed the drawing-room the honour of receiving the visitor.

Maria sat at a table, her drawing materials before her. Miss Meta, perched in a high chair, was accommodated with a pencil and paper opposite. "It's Mrs. Pain in a mask," was Margery's salutation.

Maria laid down her pencil "Mrs. Pain in a mask!" she echoed.

"It looks like nothing else, ma'am," responded Margery. "I never saw Christian folks make themselves into such spectacles before. It's to be hoped she won't go in that guise to call at Ashlydyat: Miss Janet would be sending for the mad doctor."

Maria smiled. "You never admire Mrs. Pain's style of dress, Margery."

"It's not taking," rejoined Margery. "Honest faces would as soon see themselves standing out from a brass pan, as with one of them brazen hats stuck upon them."

Apart from her prejudices against Mrs. Pain—whatever those prejudices might be—it was evident that Margery did not admire the fashionable head-gear. Maria moved to the door, and Miss Meta scrambled off her chair to follow her. "Meta go too, mamma."

Margery caught the child up as if she were snatching her from a fiery furnace, smothered her in her arms, and whispered unheard-of visions of immediate cakes and sweetmeats, that were to be had by ascending to the nursery, and bore her away in triumph. Did she fear there was contamination for the child in Mrs. Pain's hat?

Maria, not having observed the bit of by-play, proceeded to the presence of Charlotte. Not a greater contrast had there been between them in those old days at Broomhead, than there was now. Maria was the same quiet, essentially lady-like girl as of yore: she looked but a girl still, in her pretty muslin dress. Charlotte was standing at the window, watching her restless horses, which the servant was driving about in the front street, but could scarcely manage. She put back her hand to Maria.

"How are you to-day, Mrs. George Godolphin? Excuse my apparent rudeness: I am looking at my horses. If the man cannot keep them within bounds, I must go down myself."

Maria took her place by the side of Charlotte. The horses looked terrific animals in her eyes, very much inclined to kick the carriage to pieces and to bolt into the Bank afterwards.

"Did you drive them here?"

"Nobody else can drive them," replied Charlotte with a laugh. "I should like to seduce Kate behind them some day when she is at Prior's Ash: she would be in a fit with fright before we were home again."

"How can you risk your own life, Mrs. Pain?"

"My life! that is a good joke," said Charlotte. "If I could not manage the horses, I should not drive them. Did you notice the one I was riding yesterday, when you met me with your husband—a party of us together?"

"Not particularly," replied Maria. "It was just at the turn of the road, you know. I think I looked chiefly at George."

"You ought to have noticed my horse. You must see him another time. He is the most splendid animal; down from London only the previous day. I rode him yesterday for the first time."

"I should not detect any of his beauties; I scarcely know one horse from another," acknowledged Maria.

"Ah! You are not particularly observant," returned Charlotte in good-humoured sarcasm. "The horse was a present to me. He cost a hundred and thirty guineas. Those animals below are getting quieter now."

She withdrew from the window, sitting down on a sofa. Maria took a seat near her. "We had been to see Mrs. Averil yesterday when we met you," observed Maria. "She is still a great sufferer."

"So Lord Averil told me," answered Charlotte. "He dined at the Folly yesterday."

"Did he? George did not mention that Lord Averil was of the party. Did you dine with them?"

"Not I," answered Charlotte. "It was bore enough to have them in the drawing-room afterwards. Only a few of them came in. As to your husband, I never set eyes upon him at all."

"He came home early. I think his head ached. He—"

"Oh, he did come home, then!" interrupted Charlotte. Maria looked surprised. "Of course he came home. Why should he not?"

"How should I know why?" was Charlotte's answer. "This house has the bother of it to-night, I hear. It is nothing but a bother, a gentleman's dinner-party!"

"It is a sort of business party to-night, I believe," observed Maria. "Verrall is coming. He told me so. Do you know how Mr. Godolphin is?"

"He seems as well as usual. He has come to-day, and I saw him for a minute. George told me that he did not appear at dinner yesterday. Margery—"

A commotion in the street. Charlotte flew to one of the windows, opened it, and stretched herself out. But she could not see the carriage, which was then in Crosse Street. A mob was collecting and shouting.

"I suppose I had better go. That stupid man never can keep horses in good humour, if they have any spirit. Good-bye, Mrs. George Godolphin."

She ran down to the hall door, giving no time for a servant to show her out. Maria proceeded to her boudoir, which looked into Crosse Street, to see whether anything was the matter.

Something might have been, but that George Godolphin, hearing the outcry, had flown out to the aid of the servant. The man, in his fear—he was a timid man with horses, and it was a wonder Charlotte kept him—had got out of the carriage. George leaped into it, took the reins and the whip, and succeeded in restoring the horses to what Charlotte called good humour. Maria's heart beat when she saw her husband there: she, like the man, was timid. George, however, alighted unharmed, and stood talking with Charlotte. He was without his hat. Then he handed Charlotte in, and stood looking up anti talking to her again, the seat being about a mile above his head. Charlotte, at any rate, had no fear; she nodded a final adieu to George, and drove away at a fast pace, George gazing after her.

Intimate as George Godolphin was with Charlotte Pain, no such thought as that of attributing it to a wrong motive ever occurred to Maria. She had been jealous of Charlotte Pain in the old days, when she was Maria Hastings, dreading that George might choose her for his wife: but with their marriage all such feeling ceased. Maria was an English gentlewoman in the best sense of the term; of a refined, retiring nature, simple and modest of speech, innocent of heart: to associate harm now with her husband and Charlotte, was a thing next to impossible for her to glance at. Unbiased by others, she would never be likely to glance at it. She did not like Charlotte: where tastes and qualities are as opposed as they were in her and Charlotte Pain, mutual preference is not easy; but, to suspect any greater cause for dislike, was foreign to Maria's nature. Had Maria even received a hint that the fine saddle-horse, boasted of by Charlotte as worthy of Maria's especial observation, and costing a hundred and thirty guineas, was a present from her husband, she would have attached no motive to the gift, but that of kindness; given him no worse word than a hint at extravagance. Maria could almost as soon have disbelieved in herself, as have disbelieved in the cardinal virtues of George Godolphin.

It was the day of one of George's dinner-parties: as Charlotte has announced for our information. Fourteen were expected to sit down, inclusive of himself and his brother. Most of them county men; men who did business with the Bank; Mr. Verrall and Lord Averil being two of them: but Mr. Verrall did not do business with the Bank, and was not looked upon as a county man. It was not Maria's custom to appear at all at these parties; she did not imitate Charlotte Pain in playing the hostess afterwards in the drawing-room. Sometimes Maria would spend these evenings out: at Ashlydyat, or at the

Rectory: sometimes, as was her intention on this evening, she would remain in her pretty boudoir, leaving the house at liberty. She had been busy at her drawing all day, and had not quitted it to stir abroad.

Mr. George had stirred abroad. Mr. George had taken a late afternoon ride with Charlotte Pain. He came home barely in time to dress. The Bank was closed for the day; the clerks had all gone, except one, the old cashier, Mr. Hurde. He sometimes stayed later than the rest.

"Any private letters for me?" inquired George, hastening into the office whip in hand, and devouring the letter-rack with eager eyes, where the unopened letters were usually placed.

The cashier, a tall man once, but stooping now, with silver spectacles and white whiskers, stretched up his head to look also. "There's one sir," he cried, before George had quite crossed the office.

George made a grab at the letter. It stuck in the rack, and he gave forth an impatient word. A blank look of disappointment came over his face when he saw the direction.

"This is not for me. This is for Mr. Hastings. Who sorted the letters?"

"Mr. Hastings, I believe, sir, as usual."

"What made him put his own letter into the rack?" muttered George to himself. He went about the office; went into the private room and searched his own table. No, there was no letter for him.

Mr. Hurde remembered that Mr. George Godolphin had been put out in the morning by not receiving an expected letter.

George looked at his watch. "There's no time to go to Verrall's," he thought. "And he would be starting to come here by the time I reached the Folly." -

Up to his own room to dress, which was not a long process. He then entered his wife's boudoir.

"Drawing still, Maria?"

She looked up with a bright glance. "I have been so industrious!

I have been drawing nearly all day. See! I have nearly finished this." George stood by the table listlessly, his thoughts preoccupied: not pleasantly preoccupied, either. Presently he began turning over the old sketches in Maria's portfolio. Maria left her seat, and stood by her husband, her arm round his neck. He was now sitting sideways on a chair.

"I put some of these drawings into the portfolio this morning," she observed. "I found them in a box in the lumber-room. They had not been disinterred, I do believe, since they came here from the Rectory. Do you remember that one, George?"

He took up the sketch she pointed to. A few moments, and then recollection flashed over him. "It is a scene near Broomhead. That is Bray's cottage."

"How glad I am that you recognise it!" she cried gleefully. "It proves that I sketched it faithfully. Do you remember the day I did it, George?"

George could not remember that. "Not particularly," he answered.

"Oh, George! It was the day when I was frightened by that snake or whatever it was. You and I and Charlotte Pain were there. We took refuge in Bray's house."

"Refuge from the snake?" asked George.

Maria laughed. "Lady Godolphin came up, and said I ought to go there and rest, and take some water. How terribly frightened I was! I can recall it still. Bray wanted to marry us afterwards," she continued, laughing more heartily.

"Bray would have married me to both you and Charlotte for a crown a-piece," said George.

"Were you in earnest when you asked me to let him do it?" she dreamily inquired, after a pause, her thoughts cast back to the past.

"I dare say I was, Maria. We do foolish things sometimes. Had you said yes, I should have thought you a silly girl afterwards for your pains."

"Of course you would. Do you see that old Welshwoman in the doorway?" resumed Maria, pointing to the drawing. "She was a nice old body, in spite of her pipe. I wonder whether she is still alive? Perhaps Margery knows. Margery had a letter from her sister this morning."

"Had she?" carelessly returned George. "I saw there was a letter for her with the Scotch postmark. Has Bray come to grief yet?"

"I fancy they are always in grief, by the frequent appeals to Margery. Lady Godolphin is kind to the wife. She tells Margery if it were not for my lady, she should starve."

An arrival was heard as Maria spoke, and George rang the bell. It was answered by Maria's maid, but George said he wanted the butler. The man appeared.

"Has Mr. Verrall come?"

No, sir. It is Mr. Godolphin."

"When Mr. Verrall comes, show him into the Bank parlour, and call me. I wish to see him before he goes into the drawing-room."

The man departed with his order. George went into the adjoining bedroom. A few minutes, and some one else was heard to come in, and run up the stairs with eager steps. It was followed by an impatient knock at Maria's door.

It proved to be Isaac Hastings. A fine-looking young man, with a sensible countenance. "Have they gone in to dinner yet, Maria?" he hastily cried.

"No. It is not time. No one has come but Mr. Godolphin."

"I did such a stupid trick! I—"

"Is it you, Isaac?" interrupted George, returning to the room. "I could not think who it was, rushing up."

"I wanted to catch you, sir, before you went in to dinner," replied Isaac, holding out a letter to George. "It came for you this afternoon," he continued, "and I put it, as I thought, into the rack; and one for myself, which also came, I put into my pocket. Just now I found I had brought yours away, and left mine."

"Yours is in the rack now," said George. "I wondered what brought it there."

He took the letter, glanced at its superscription, and retired to the window to read it. There appeared to be but a very few lines. George read it twice over, and then lifted his flushed face: flushed, as it seemed, with pain—with a perplexed, hopeless sort of expression. Maria could see his face reflected in the glass. She turned to him:

"George, what is it? You have had bad news!"

He crushed the letter in his hand. "Bad news! Nothing of the sort. Why should you think that? It is a business letter that I ought to have had yesterday, though, and I am vexed at the delay."

He left the room again. Isaac prepared to depart.

"Will you stay and take tea with me, Isaac?" asked Maria. "I have dined. I am expecting Rose."

"I am taking tea already," answered Isaac, with a laugh. "I was at Grace's. We were beginning tea, when I put my hand into my pocket to take out my letter, and found it was George Godolphin's."

"You were not in haste to read your own letter," returned Maria.

"No. I knew who it was from. There was no hurry. I ran all the way from Grace's here, and now I must run back again. Good-bye, Maria."

Isaac went away. George was in and out of the room, walking about in a restless manner. Several arrivals had been heard, and Maria felt sure that all the guests, or nearly all, must have arrived. "Why don't you go to them, George?" she asked.

The hour for dinner struck as she spoke, and George left the room. He did not enter the drawing-room, but went down and spoke to the butler.

"Has Mr. Verrall not come yet?"

"No, sir. Every one else is here."

George retraced his steps and entered the drawing-room. He was gay George again: handsome George; not a line of perplexity could be traced on his open brow, not a shade of care in his bright blue eye.

He shook hands with his guests, offering only a half apology for his tardiness, and saying that he knew his brother was there to replace him.

Some minutes of busy conversation, and then it flagged: another few minutes of it, and a second flag. Thomas Godolphin whispered to his brother. "George, I should not wait. Mr. Verrall cannot be coming."

George went quite red with anger, or some other feeling. "Not be coming? Of course he is coming? Nothing is likely to detain him."

Thomas said no more. But the waiting— Well, you all know what it is, this awkward waiting for dinner. By-and-by the butler looked into the room. George thought it might be a hint that dinner was spoiling, and he reluctantly gave orders that it should be served.

A knock at the door—a loud knock—resounding through the house. George Godolphin's face lighted up. "There he is!" he exclaimed. "But it is too bad of him to keep us waiting."

There he is not, George might have said, could he have seen through the closed door the applicant standing there. It was only Maria's evening visitor, pretty Rose Hastings.

Part 2. Chapter 5.

A REVELATION.

The dinner-table was spacious, consequently the absence of one was conspicuous. Mr. Verrall's chair was still left for him: he would come yet, George said. - No clergyman was present, and Thomas Godolphin said grace. He sat at the foot of the table, opposite to his brother.

"We are thirteen!" exclaimed Sir John Pevans, a young baronet, who had been reared a milksop, and feared consumption for himself. "I don't much like it. It is the ominous number, you know."

Some of them laughed. "What is that peculiar superstition?" asked

Colonel Max. "I have never been able to understand it."

"The superstition is, that if thirteen sit down to dinner, one of them is sure to die before the year is out," replied young Pevans, speaking with great seriousness.

"Why is thirteen not as good a number to sit down as any other?" cried Colonel Max, humouring the baronet. "As good as fourteen, for instance?"

"It's the odd number, I suppose."

"The odd number. It's no more the odd number, Pevans, than any other number's odd. What do you say to eleven?—what do you say to fifteen?"

"I can't explain it," returned Sir John. "I only know that the superstition exists, and that I have noticed, in more instances than one, that it has been borne out. Three or four parties who have sat down thirteen to dinner, have lost one of them before the year has come round. You laugh at me, of course; I have been laughed at before:

but suppose you notice it now? We are thirteen of us: see if we are all alive by the end of the year."

Thomas Godolphin, in his inmost heart, thought it not unlikely that one of them, at any rate, would not be there. Several faces were broad with amusement: the most serious of them was Lord Averil's.

"You don't believe in it, Averil!" muttered Colonel Max in surprise, as he gazed at him.

"I!" was the answer. "Certainly not. Why should you ask it?"

"You look so grave over it."

"I never like to joke, though it be only by a smile, on the subject of death," replied Lord Averil. "I once received a lesson upon the point, and it will serve me my life."

"Will your lordship tell us what it was!" interposed Sir John, who had been introduced to Lord Averil to-day for the first time.

"I cannot do so now," replied Lord Averil. "The subject is not suited to a merry party," he frankly added. "But it would not help to bear out your superstition, Sir John: you are possibly thinking that it might do so."

5

"If I have sat down once thirteen, I have sat down fifty times," cried Colonel Max, "and we all lived the year out and many a year on to it. You are a sociable fellow to invite out to dinner, Pevans! I fancy Mr. George Godolphin must be thinking so."

Mr. George Godolphin appeared to be thinking of something that rendered him somewhat distrait. In point of fact, his duties as host were considerably broken by listening to the door. Above the conversation his ear was strained, hoping for the knock that should announce Mr. Verrall. It was of course strange that he neither appeared nor sent an excuse. But no knock seemed to come: and George could only rally his powers and forget Mr. Verrall.

It was a *recherché* repast. George Godolphin's state dinners always were so. No trouble or expense was spared for them. Luxuries, in season and out of season, would be there. The turtle would seem richer at his table than at any other, the venison more delicate; the Moselle of fuller flavour, the sparkling hermitage of rarest vintage.

The evening passed on. Some of the gentlemen were solacing themselves with a cup of coffee, when the butler slipped a note into his master's hand. "The man waits for an answer, sir," he whispered. And George glided out of the room, and opened the note.

"DEAR GODOLPHIN,

"I am ill and lonely, and have halted here midway in my journey for a night's rest before going on again, which I must do at six in the morning. Come in for half an hour—there's a good fellow! I don't know when we may meet again. The regiment embarks to-morrow; and can't embark without me. Come at once, or I shall be gone to bed.

"G. St AUBYN."

One burning, almost irrepressible desire had hung over George all the evening—that he could run up to Verrall's and learn the cause of his absence. Mr. Verrall's absence in itself would not in the least have troubled George; but he had a most urgent reason for wishing to see him hence his anxiety. To leave his guests to themselves would have been scarcely the thing to do: but this note appeared to afford just the excuse wanted. At any rate, George determined to make it an excuse. The note was dated from the principal inn of the place.

"One of the waiters brought this, I suppose, Pierce?" he said to the butler.

"Yes, sir."

"My compliments, and I will be with Captain St. Aubyn directly."

George went into the room again, and drew his brother aside.

"Thomas, you'll be host for me for half an hour," he whispered. "St. Aubyn has just sent me an urgent summons to go and see him at the Bell. He was passing through Prior's Ash, and is forced to halt and lie up: he's very ill. I'll soon be back again."

Away he went. Thomas felt unusually well that evening, and exerted himself for his brother. Once out of the house, George hesitated. Should he dash up to Lady Godolphin's Folly first, and ease his

mind, or should he go first to the Bell? The Bell was very near, but in the opposite direction to Ashlydyat. He turned first to the Bell, and was soon in the presence of Captain St. Aubyn, an old friend, now bound for Malta.

"I am sorry to have sent for you," exclaimed Captain St. Aubyn, holding out his hand to George. "I hear you have friends this evening."

"It is just the kindest thing you could have done," impulsively answered George. "I would have given a five-pound note out of my pocket for a plea to absent myself; and your letter came and afforded it."

What more he chose to explain was between themselves: it was not much: and in five minutes George was on his way to Lady Godolphin's Folly. On he strode, his eager feet scarcely touching the ground. He lifted his hat and bared his brow, hot with anxiety, to the night air. It was a very light night, the moon high: and, as George pushed on through the dark grove of the Folly, he saw Charlotte Pain emerging from the same at a little distance, a dark shawl, or mantle, thrown completely over her head and figure, apparently for the purpose of disguise or concealment. Her face was turned for a moment towards the moonlight, and there was no mistaking the features of Charlotte Pain. Then she crouched down, and sped along under the friendly cover of the trees. George hastened to overtake her.

But when he got up with her, as he thought, there was no Charlotte there. There was no any one. Where had she crept to? How had she disappeared? She must have plunged into the trees again. But George was in too much haste then to see Mr. Verrall, to puzzle himself about Charlotte. He crossed to the terrace, and rang the bell.

Were the servants making merry? He had to ring again. A tolerable peal this time. Its echoes might have been heard at Ashlydyat.

"Is Mr. Verrall at home?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Pain is."

"Mrs. Pain is not," thought George to himself. But he followed the man to the drawing-room.

To his indescribable astonishment, there sat Charlotte, at work. She was in evening dress, her gown and hair interlaced with jewels. Calmly and quietly sat she, very quietly for her, her King Charley reposing upon a chair at her side, fast asleep. It was next to impossible to fancy, or believe, that she could have been outside a minute or two ago, racing in and out of the trees, as if dodging some one, perhaps himself. And yet, had it been necessary, George thought he could have sworn that the face he saw was the face of Charlotte. So bewildered did he feel, as to be diverted for a moment from the business which had brought him there.

"You may well be surprised!" cried Charlotte, looking at him; and George noticed as she spoke that there was some peculiar expression in her face not usual to it. "To see me at work is one of the world's wonders. A crochet mat took my fancy to-day in a shop, and I bought it, thinking I would make one like it. Instead of making one, I have managed to unravel the other."

She pointed to the ground as she spoke. There, half covered by her dress, lay a heap of crinkled cotton; no doubt the unravelled mat. Charlotte was plying her needle again with assiduity, her eyes studying the instructions at her elbow.

"How very quickly you must have come in!" exclaimed George.

"Come in from where?" asked Charlotte.

"As I went up to the door, I saw you stooping near the grove on the left, something dark over your head."

"You dreamt it," said Charlotte. "I have not been out."

"But I certainly did see you," repeated George. "I could not be mistaken. You—were I fanciful, Charlotte, I should say you were in mischief, and wanted to escape observation. You were stooping under the shade of the trees and running along quickly."

Charlotte lifted her face and looked at him with wondering eyes. "Are you joking, or are you in earnest?" asked she.

"I never was more in earnest in my life. I could have staked my existence upon its being you."

"Then I assure you, I have not stirred out of this room since I came into it from dinner. What possessed me to try this senseless work, I cannot tell," she added, flinging it across the floor in a momentary accession of temper. "It has given me a headache, and they brought me some tea."

"You are looking very poorly," remarked George.

"Am I? I don't often have such a headache as this. The pain is here, over my left temple. Bathe it for me, will you, George?" A handkerchief and some eau-de-Cologne were lying on the table beside her. George gallantly undertook the office: but he could not get over his wonder. "I'll tell you what, Charlotte. If it was not yourself, it must have been your—"

"It must have been my old blind black dog," interrupted Charlotte. "He has a habit of creeping about the trees at night. There I am sure that's near enough. I don't believe it was anything or any one."

"Your double, I was going to say," persisted George. "I never saw your face if I did not think I saw it then. It proves how mistaken we may be. Where's Verrall? A pretty trick he played me this evening."

"What trick?" repeated Charlotte. "Verrall's gone to London."

"Gone to London!" shouted George, his tone one of painful dismay.

"It cannot be."

"It is," said Charlotte. "When I came in from our ride I found Verrall going off by train. He had received a telegraphic message, which took him away."

"Why did he not call upon me? He knew—he knew—the necessity there was for me to see him. He ought to have come to me."

"I suppose he was in a hurry to catch the train," said Charlotte.

"Why did he not send?"

"He did send. I heard him send a verbal message by one of the servants, to the effect that he was summoned unexpectedly to London, and could not, therefore, attend your dinner. How early you have broken up!"

"We have not broken up. I left my guests to see after Verrall. No message was brought to me."

"Then I will inquire," began Charlotte, rising. George gently pushed her back.

"It is of little consequence," he said. "It might have saved me some suspense; but I am glad I got dinner over without knowing it. I must see Verrall."

Charlotte carried her point, and rang the bell. "If you are glad, George, it is no extenuation for the negligence of the servants. They may be forgetting some message of more importance, if they are left unproved now."

But forgotten the message had not been. The servant, it appeared, had misunderstood his master, and carried the message to Ashlydyat, instead of to the Bank.

"How very stupid he must have been!" remarked Charlotte to George, when the explanation was given. "I think some people have only half their share of brains."

"Charlotte, I must see Verrall. I received a letter this evening from London which I ought to have had yesterday, and it has driven me to my wits' end."

"About the old business?" questioned Charlotte.

"Just so. Look here."

He took the letter from his pocket: the letter brought back to him by Isaac Hastings, and which he had assured Maria had not contained bad news: opened it, and handed it to Charlotte for her perusal.

Better, possibly, for Mr. George Godolphin that he had made a bosom friend of his wife than of Charlotte Pain! Better for gentlemen in general, it may be, that they should tell their secrets to their wives than to their wives' would-be rivals—however comprehensive the fascinations of these latter ladies may be. George, however, had made his own bed, as we all do; and George would have to lie upon it.

"What am I to do, Charlotte?"

Charlotte sat bending over the note, and pressing her forehead. Her look was one of perplexity; perplexity great as George's.

"It is a dangerous position," she said at length. "If not averted—"

She came to a dead pause, and their eyes met.

"Ay!" he repeated—"if not averted! Nothing would remain for me but—"

"Hush, George," said she, laying her hand upon his lips, and then letting it fall upon his fingers, where it remained.

There they sat, it is hard to say how long, their heads together, talking earnestly. Charlotte was in his full confidence. Whatever may have been the nature, the depth of his perplexities, she fathomed them. At length George sprang up with a start.

"I am forgetting everything. I forgot those people were still at home, waiting for me. Charlotte, I must go."

She rose, put her arm within his, and took a step with him, as if she would herself let him out. Perhaps she was in the habit of letting him out.

"Not there! not that way!" she abruptly said, for George was turning to unclosethe shutters of the window. "Come into the next room, and I'll open that."

The next room was in darkness. They opened the window, and stood yet a minute within the room, talking anxiously still. Then he left her, and went forth.

He intended to take the lonely road homewards, as being the nearer; that dark, narrow road you may remember to have heard of, where the ash-trees met overhead, and, as report went, a ghost was in the habit of taking walking exercise by night. George had no thought for ghosts just then: he had a "ghost" within him, frightful enough to scare away a whole lane full of the others. Nevertheless, George Godolphin did take a step backward with a start, when, just within the Ash-tree Walk, after passing the turnstile, there came a dismal groan from some dark figure seated on a broken bench.

It was all dark together there. The ash-trees hid the moon; George had just emerged from where her beams shone bright and open; and not at first did he distinguish who was sitting there. But his eyes grew accustomed to the obscurity.

"Thomas!" he cried, in consternation. "Is it you?"

For answer, Thomas Godolphin caught hold of his brother, bent forward, and laid his forehead upon George's arm, another deep groan breaking from him.

That George Godolphin would rather have been waylaid by a real ghost, than by his brother at that particular time and place, was certain. Better that the whole world should detect any undue anxiety for Mr. Verrall's companionship just then, than that Thomas Godolphin should do so. At least, George thought so: but conscience makes cowards of us all. Nevertheless, he gave his earnest sympathy to his brother.

"Lean on me, Thomas. Let me support you. How have you been taken ill?"

Another minute, and the paroxysm was past. Thomas wiped the dew from his brow, and George sat down on the narrow bench beside him.

"How came you to be here alone, Thomas? Where is your carriage?"

"I ordered the carriage early, and it came just as you had gone out," explained Thomas. "Feeling well, I sent it away as I had to wait, saying I would walk home. The pain overtook me just as I reached this spot, and but for the bench I should have fallen. But, George, what brings you here?" was the next very natural question. "You told me you were going to the Bell?"

"So I was; so I did," said George, speaking volubly. "St. Aubyn I found very poorly; I told him he would be best in bed, and came away. It was a nice night; I felt inclined for a run, so I came up here to ask Verrall what had kept him from dinner. He was sent for to London, it seems, and the stupid servant took his apology to Ashlydyat, instead of to the Bank."

Thomas Godolphin might well have rejoined, "If Verrall is away, where have you stopped?" But he made no remark.

"Have they all gone?" asked George, alluding to his guests.

"They have all gone. I made it right with them respecting your absence. My being there was almost the same thing; they appeared to regard it so. George, I believe I must have your arm as far as the house. See what an old man I am getting."

"Will you not rest longer? I am in no hurry, as they have left.

What can this pain be, that seems to be attacking you of late?"

"Has it never occurred to you what it may be?" quietly rejoined Thomas.

"No," replied George. But he noticed that Thomas's tone was peculiar, and he began to run over in his own mind all the pharmacopoeia of ailments that flesh is heir to. "It cannot be rheumatism, Thomas?"

"It is something worse than rheumatism," said Thomas, in his serene, ever-thoughtful way. "A short time, George, and you will be master of Ashlydyat."

George's heart seemed to stand still, and then bound onwards in a tumult. The words struck upon every chord of feeling he possessed— struck from more causes than one.

"What do you mean, Thomas? What do you fear may be the matter with you?"

"Do you remember what killed our mother?"

There was a painful pause. "Oh, Thomas!"

"It is so," said Thomas, quietly.

"I hope you are mistaken! I hope you are mistaken reiterated George. "Have you had advice? You must have advice."

"I have had it. Snow confirms my own suspicions. I desired the truth."

"Who's Snow?" returned George, disparagingly. "Go up to London, Thomas; consult the best man there. Or telegraph for one of them to come down to you."

"For the satisfaction of you all, I may do so," he replied. "But it cannot benefit me, George."

"Good Heavens, what a dreadful thing!" returned George, with feeling. "What a blow to fall upon you!"

"You would regard it so, were it to fall upon you; and naturally. You are young, joyous; you have your wife and child. I have none of these attributes: and—if I had them all, we are in the hands of One who knows what is best for us."

George Godolphin did not feel very joyous just then: had not felt particularly joyous for a long time. Somehow, his own inward care was more palpable to him than this news, sad though it was, imparted by his brother. He lifted his right hand to his temples and kept it there. Thomas suffered his right hand to fall upon George's left, which rested on his knee. A more holy contact than that imparted by Mrs. Charlotte Pain's.

"Don't grieve, George. I am more than resigned. I think of it as a happy change. This world, taken at its best, is full of care: if we seem free from it one year, it only falls upon us more unsparingly the next. It is wisely ordered: were earth made too pleasant for us, we might be wishing that it could be permanently our home."

Heaven knew that George had enough care upon him. He knew it. But he was not weary of the world. Few do weary of it, whatever may be their care, until they have learned to look for a better.

"In the days gone by, I have felt tempted to wonder why Ethel should have been taken," resumed Thomas Godolphin. "I see now how merciful was the fiat, George. I have been more thoughtful, more observant, perhaps, than many are; and I have learnt to see, to know, how marvellously all these fiats are fraught with mercy; full of gloom as they may seem to us. It would have been a bitter trial to me to leave her here unprotected; in deep sorrow; perhaps with young children- I scarcely think I could have been reconciled to go; and I know what her grief would have been. All's for the best."

Most rare was it for undemonstrative Thomas Godolphin thus to express his hidden sentiments. George never knew him to do so before. Time and place were peculiarly fitted for it: the still, light night, telling of peace; the dark trees around, the blue sky overhead. In these paroxysms of disease, Thomas felt brought almost face to face with death.

"It will be a blow to Janet!" exclaimed George, the thought striking him.

"She will feel it as one."

"Thomas! can nothing be done for you?" was the impulsive rejoinder, spoken in all hearty good-feeling.

"Could it be done or my mother, George?"

"I know. But, since then, science has made strides. Diseases, once deemed incurable, yield now to skill and enlightenment. I wish you would go to London!"

"There are some few diseases which bring death with them, in spite of human skill: will bring it to the end of time," rejoined Thomas Godolphin. "This is one of them."

"Well, Thomas, you have given me my pill for to-night: and for a great-many more nights, and days too. I wish I had not heard it! But that, you will say, is a wish savouring only of selfishness. It is a dreadful affliction for you! Thomas, I must say it—a dreadful affliction"

"The disease, or the ending, do you mean?" Thomas asked, with a smile.

"Both. But I spoke more particularly of the disease. That in itself is a lingering death, and nothing less."

"A lingering death is the most favoured death—as I regard it: a sudden death the most unhappy. See what time is given me to 'set my house in order,'" he added, the sober, pleasant smile deepening. "I must not fail to do it well, must I?"

"And the pain, Thomas; that will be lingering, too."

"I must bear it."

He rose as he spoke, and put his arm within his brother's. George seemed to him then the same powerful protector that he, Thomas, must have seemed to Sir George in that midnight walk at Broomhead. He stood a minute or two, as if gathering strength, and then walked forward, leaning heavily on George. It was the pain, the excessive agony that so unnerved him: a little while, and he would seem in the possession of his usual strength again.

"Ay, George, it will soon be yours. I shall not long keep you out of Ashlydyat. I cannot quite tell how you will manage alone at the Bank when I am gone," he continued, in a more business tone. "I think of it a great deal. Sometimes I fancy it might be better if you took a staid, sober partner; one middle aged. A thorough man of business. Great confidence has been accorded me, you know, George. I suppose people like my steady habits."

"They like you for your integrity," returned George, the words seeming to break from him impulsively. "I shall manage very well, I dare say, when the time comes. I suppose I must settle down to steadiness also; to be more as you have been. I can," he continued, as if in soliloquy. "I can, and I will."

"And, George, you will be a good master," continued Thomas. "Be a kind, considerate master to all who shall then be dependent on you. I have tried to be so: and, now that the end has come, it is, I assure you, a pleasant consciousness to possess—to look back upon. I have a few, very few, poor pensioners who may have been a little the better for me: those I shall take care of and Janet will sometimes see them. But some of the servants lapse to you with Ashlydyat: I speak of them.

Make them comfortable. Most of them are already in years take care of them when they shall be too old to work."

"Oh, I'll do that," said George. "I expect Janet—"

George's words died away. They had rounded the ash-trees, and were fronting the Dark Plain. White enough looked the plain that night; but dark was the Shadow on it. Yes, it was there! The dark, portentous, terrific Shadow of Ashlydyat!

They stood still. Perhaps their hearts stood still. Who can know? A man would rather confess to an unholy deed, than acknowledge his belief in a ghostly superstition.

"How dark it is to-night!" broke from George.

In truth, it had never been darker, never more intensely distinct. If, as the popular belief went, the evil to overtake the Godolphins was foreshadowed to be greater or less, according to the darker or lighter hue of the Shadow, then never did such ill fall on the Godolphins, as' was to fall now.

"It is black, not dark," replied Thomas, in answer to George's remark. "I never saw it so black as it is now. Last night it was comparatively light."

George turned his gaze quickly upwards to the moon, searching in the aspect of that luminary a solution to the darker shade of to-night. "There's no difference!" he cried aloud. "The moon was as bright as this, last night, but not brighter. I don't think it could be brighter. You say the Shadow was there last night, Thomas?"

"Yes. But not so dark as now."

"But, Thomas! you were ill last night; you could not see it."

"I came as far as the turnstile here with Lord Averil. He called at Ashlydyat after leaving Lady Godolphin's Folly. I was better then, and strolled out of the house with him."

"Did he see the Shadow?"

"I don't know. It was there; but not very distinct. He did not appear to see it. We were passing quickly, and talking about my illness."

"Did you give Averil any hint of what your illness may be?" asked George hastily.

"Not an indication of it. Janet, Snow, and you, are my only confidants as yet. Bexley is partially so. Were that Shadow to be seen by Prior's Ash, and the fact of my illness transpired, people would say that it was a forewarning of my end," he continued, with a grave smile, as he and George turned to pursue their road to Ashlydyat.

They reached the porch in silence. George shook hands with his brother. "Don't attempt to come to business to-morrow;" he said. "I will come up in the evening, and see you."

"Won't you come in now, George?"

"Not now. Good night, Thomas. I heartily wish you better."

George turned and retraced his steps, past the ash-trees, past the Dark Plain. Intensely black the Shadow certainly looked: darker even than when he had passed it just before—at least so it appeared to George's eyes. He halted a moment, quite struck with the sombre hue. "Thomas said it appeared light last night," he half muttered:

"and for him death cannot be much of an evil. Superstitious Janet, daft Margery, would both say that the evil affects me: that I am to bring it" he added, with a smile of mockery at the words. "Angry enough it certainly looks!"

It did look angry. But George vouchsafed it no further attention. He had too much on his mind to give heed to shadows, even though it were the ominous Shadow of Ashlydyat. George, as he had said to Charlotte Pain, was very nearly at his wits' end. One of his minor perplexities was, how he should get to London. He had urgent necessity for proceeding in search of Mr. Verrall, and equally urgent was it that the expedition should be kept from Thomas Godolphin. What excuse could he invent for his absence?

Rapidly arranging his plans, he proceeded again to the Bell Inn, held a few minutes' confidential conversation with Captain St. Aubyn, waking that gentleman out of his first sleep for it—not that he by any means enlightened him as to any trouble that might be running riot in his brain—and then went home. Maria came forward to meet him.

"How is poor Captain St. Aubyn, George? Very ill?"

"Very. How did you know anything about it, Maria?"

"Thomas told me you had been sent for. Thomas came to my sitting-room before he left, after the rest had gone. You have stayed a good while with him."

"Ay. What should you say if I were to go back and stop the night with him?" asked George, half jokingly.

"Is he so ill as that?"

"And also to accompany him a stage or two on his journey tomorrow morning? He starts at six, and is about as fit to travel as an invalid just out of bed after a month's illness."

"Do you really mean that you are going to do all that, George?" she inquired, in surprise.

George nodded. "I do not fancy Thomas will be here to-morrow, Maria. Ask to speak to Isaac when he comes in the morning. Tell him

that I shall be home some time in the afternoon, but I have gone out of town a few miles with a sick friend. He can say so if I am particularly inquired for."

George went to his room. Maria followed him. He was changing his coat and waistcoat, and threw an overcoat upon his arm. Then he looked at his watch.

"What is the time?" asked Maria.

"Twenty minutes past eleven. Good night, my darling."

She fondly held his face down to hers while he kissed her, giving him —as George had once saucily told her she would—kiss for kiss. There was no shame in it now; only love. "Oh, George, my dearest, mind you come back safe and well to me!" she murmured, tears filling her eyes.

"Don't I always come back safe and well to you, you foolish child?

Take care of yourself, Maria."

Maria's hand rested lingeringly in his. Could she have divined that Mr. George's tender adieux sometimes strayed elsewhere! —that his confidences were given, but not to her! George went out, and the hall door closed upon him.

It was well Maria did not watch him away! Well for her astonishment. Instead of going to the Bell Inn, he turned short round to the left, and took the by-way which led to the railway station, gaining it in time to catch the express train, which passed through Prior's Ash at midnight for London.

Part 2. Chapter 6.

MR. VERRALL'S CHAMBERS.

In thoroughly handsome chambers towards the west-end of London, fitted up with costly elegance, more in accordance (one would think) with a place consecrated to the refinements of life, than to business, there- sat one morning a dark gentleman, of staid and respectable appearance. To look at his clean, smoothly shaven face, his grey hair, his gold-rimmed spectacles, his appearance altogether, every item of which carried respectability with it, you might have trusted the man at a first glance. In point of fact, he was got up to be trusted. A fire was pleasant on those spring mornings, and a large and clear one flamed in the burnished grate. Miniature statues, and other articles possessing, one must suppose, some rare excellence, gave to the room a refined look; and the venerable gentleman (venerable in sober respectability, you must understand, more than from age, for his years were barely fifty) sat enjoying its blaze, and culling choice morsels from the Times. The money article, the price of stock, a large insolvency case, and other news especially acceptable to men of business, were being eagerly read by him.

An architect might have taken a model of these chambers, so artistically were they arranged. A client could pass into any one of the three rooms, and not come out by the same door; he might reach them by the wide, handsome staircase, descend by means of a ladder, -and emerge in a back street. Not absolutely a ladder, but a staircase so narrow as almost to deserve the name. It did happen, once in a way, that a gentleman might prefer that means of exit, even if he did not of entrance. These chambers were, not to keep you longer in suspense, the offices of the great bill-discounting firm, Trueworthy and Co.

One peculiar feature in their internal economy was, that no client ever got to see Mr. Trueworthy. He was too great a man to stoop to business in his own proper person. He was taking his pleasure in the East; or he was on a visit to some foreign court, the especial guest of its imperial head; or sojourning with his bosom friend the Duke of Dorsetshire at his shooting-box; or reposing at his own country seat; or ill in bed with gout. From one or other of these contingencies Mr. Trueworthy was invariably invisible. It happened now and then that there was a disturbance in these elegant chambers, caused by some

ill-bred and ill-advised gentleman, who persisted in saying that he had been hardly treated—in point of fact, ruined. One or two had, on these occasions, broadly asserted their conviction that there was no Mr. worthy at all: but of course their ravings, whether on the score of own wrongs, or on the non-existence of that estimable gentleman, whose fashionable movements might have filled a weekly column of the Court Circular, were taken for what they were worth.

In the years gone by—only a very few years, though—the firm had owned another head: at any rate, another name. - A young, fair man, who had disdained the exclusiveness adopted by his successor, and deemed himself not too great a mortal to be seen of men. This unfortunate principal had managed his affairs badly. In some way or other he came to grief. Perhaps the blame lay in his youth. Someone was so wicked as to prefer against him a charge of swindling; and ill-natured tongues said it would go hard with him—fifteen years at least. What they meant by the last phrase, they best knew. Like many another charge, it never came to anything. The very hour before he would have been captured, he made his escape, and had never since been seen or heard of. Some surmised that he was dead, some that he was in hiding abroad: only one thing was certain—that into this country he could not again enter.

All that, however, was past and gone. The gentleman, Mr. Brompton, sitting at his ease over his newspaper, his legs stretched out to the blaze, was the confidential manager and head of the office. Half the applicants did not know but that he was its principal: strangers, at first, invariably believed that he was so. A lesser satellite, a clerk, or whatever he might be, sat in an Outer room, and bowed in the clients, his bow showing far more deference to this gentleman than to the clients themselves. How could the uninitiated suppose that he was anything less than the principal?

On this morning there went up the broad staircase a gentleman whose remarkably good looks drew the eyes of the passers-by towards him, as he got out of the cab which brought him. The clerk took a hasty step forward to arrest his progress, for the gentleman was crossing the office with a bold step: and all steps might not be admitted to that inner room. The gentleman, however, put up his hand, as if to say, Don't you know me? and went on. The clerk, who at the first moment had probably not had time to recognize him, threw open the inner door.

"Mr. George Godolphin, sir."

Mr. George Godolphin strode on. He was evidently not on familiar terms with the gentleman who rose to receive him, for he did not shake hands with him. His tone and manner were courteous.

"Is Mr. Verrall here?"

"He is not here, Mr. Godolphin. I am not sure that he will be here to-day."

"I must see him," said George, firmly. "I have followed him to town to see him. You know that he came up yesterday?"

"Yes. I met him last night."

"I should suppose, as he was sent for unexpectedly—which I hear was the case—that he was sent for on business; and therefore that he would be here to—day," pursued George.

"I am not sure of it. He left it an open question."

George looked uncommonly perplexed. "I must see him, and I must be back at Prior's Ash during business hours to-day. I must catch the eleven down-train if possible."

"Can I do for you as well as Mr. Verrall?" asked Mr. Brompton, after a pause.

"No, you can't. Verrall I must see. It is very strange that you don't know whether he is to be here or not."

"It happens to-day that I do not know. Mr. Verrall left it last night, I say, an open question."

"It is the loss of time that I am thinking of," returned George. "You see if I go down now to his residence, he may have left it to come up here; and we should just miss each other."

"Very true," asserted Brompton.

George stood for a moment in thought, and then turned on his heel, and departed. "Do you know whether Mr. Verrall will be up this morning?" he asked of the clerk, as he passed through the outer room.

The clerk shook his head. "I am unable to say, sir."

George went down to the cab, and entered it. "Where to, sir?" asked the driver, as he closed the door.

"The South-Western Railway."

As the echo of George's footsteps died away on the stairs, Mr. Brompton, first slipping the bolt of the door which led into the clerk's room, opened the door of another room. A double door, thoroughly well padded, deadened all sound between the apartments. It was a larger and more luxurious room still. Two gentlemen were seated in it by a similarly bright fire: though, to look at the face of the one—a young man, whose handkerchief, as it lay carelessly on the table beside him, bore a viscount's coronet—no one would have thought any fire was needed. His face was glowing, and he was talking in angry excitement, but with a tone and manner somewhat subdued, as if he were in, the presence of a Master, and dared not put forth his metal. In short, he looked something like a caged lion. Opposite to him, listening with cold, imperturbable courtesy, his face utterly impassive, as it ever was, his eyes calm, his yellow hair in perfect order, his moustache trimmed, his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, and the tips of his fingers meeting, on one of which fingers shone a monster diamond of the purest water, was Mr. Verrall. Early as the hour was, glasses and champagne stood on the table.

Mr. Brompton telegraphed a sign to Mr. Verrall, and he came out, leaving the viscount to waste his anger upon air. The viscount might rely on one thing: that it was just as good to bestow it upon air as upon Mr. Verrall, for all the impression it would make on the latter.

"Godolphin has been here," said Mr. Brompton, keeping the doors carefully closed.

"He has followed me to town, then! I thought he might do so. It is of no use my seeing him. If he won't go deeper into the mire, why, the explosion must come."

"He must go deeper into it," remarked Mr. Brompton.

"He holds out against it, and words seem wasted on him. Where's he gone now?"

"Down to your house, I expect. He says he must be back home to-day, but must see you first. I thought you would not care to meet him, so I said I didn't know whether you'd be here or not."

Mr. Verrall mused. "Yes, I'll see him. I can't deal with him altogether as I do with others. And he has been a lucky card to us."

Mr. Verrall went back to his viscount, who by that time was striding explosively up and down the room. Mr. Brompton sat down to his paper again, and his interesting news of the Insolvency Court.

In one of the most charming villas on the banks of the Thames, a villa which literally lacked nothing that money could buy, sat Mrs. Verrall at a late breakfast, on that same morning. She jumped up with a little scream at the sight of George Godolphin crossing the velvet lawn.

"What bad news have you come to tell me? Is Charlotte killed? Or is Lady Godolphin's Folly on fire?"

"Charlotte was well when I left her, and the Folly standing," replied George, throwing care momentarily to the winds; as he was sure to do in the presence of a pretty woman.

"She will be killed, you know, some day with those horses of hers," rejoined Mrs. Verrall. "What have you come for, then, at this unexpected hour? When Verrall arrived last night, he said you were giving a dinner at Prior's Ash."

"I want to see Verrall. Is he up yet?"

"Up! He was up and away ages before I awoke. He went up early to the office."

George paused. "I have been to the office, and Mr. Brompton said he did not know whether he would be there to-day at all."

"Oh, well, I don't know," returned Mrs. Verrall, believing she might have made an inconvenient admission. "When he goes up to town, I assume he goes to the office; but he may be bound to the wilds of Siberia for anything I can tell."

"When do you expect him home?" asked George.

"I did not ask him," carelessly replied Mrs. Verrall. "It may be to-day, or it may be next month. What will you take for breakfast?"

"I will not take anything," returned George, holding out his hand to depart.

"But you are not going again in this hasty manner! What sort of a visit do you call this?"

"A hasty one," replied George. "I must be at Prior's Ash this afternoon. Any message to Charlotte?"

"Why—yes—I have," said Mrs. Verrall, with some emphasis. "I was about to despatch a small parcel this very next hour to Charlotte, by post. But—when shall you see her? To-night?"

"I can see her to-night if you wish it."

"It would oblige me much. The truth is, it is something I ought to have sent yesterday, and I forgot it. Be sure and let her have it to-night."

Mrs. Verrall rang, and a small packet, no larger than a bulky letter, was brought in. George took it, and was soon being whirled back to London.

He stepped into a cab at the Waterloo Station, telling the man he should have double pay if he drove at double speed: and it conveyed him to Mr. Verrall's chambers.

George went straight to Mr. Brompton's room, as before. That gentleman had finished his Times, and was buried deep in a pile of letters. "Is Mr. Verrall in now?" asked George.

"He is here now, Mr. Godolphin. He was here two minutes after you departed: it's a wonder you did not meet."

George knew the way to Mr. Verrall's room, and was allowed to enter. Mr. Verrall, alone then, turned round with a cordial grasp.

"Holloa!" said he. "We somehow missed this morning. How are you?"

"I say, Verrall, how came you to play me such a trick as to go off in that clandestine manner yesterday?" remonstrated George. "You know the uncertainty I was in: that if I did not get what I hoped for, I should be on my beam ends?"

"My dear fellow, I supposed you had got it. Hearing nothing of you all day, I concluded it had come by the morning's post."

"It had not come then," returned George, crustily, In spite of his blind trust in the unbleached good faith of Mr. Verrall, there were moments when a thought would cross him as to whether that gentleman had been playing a double game. This was one of them.

"I had a hasty summons, and was obliged to come away without delay," explained Mr. Verrall. "I sent you a message."

"Which I never received," retorted George. "But the message is not the question. See here! A pretty letter, this, for a man to read. It came by the afternoon post."

Mr. Verrall took the letter, and digested the contents deliberately; in all probability he had known their substance before.

"What do you think of it?" demanded George.

"It's unfortunate," said Mr. Verrall.

"It's ruin," returned George.

"Unless averted. But it must be averted."

"How?" -

"There is one way, you know," said Mr. Verrall, after a pause. "I have pointed it out to you already."

"And I wish your tongue had been blistered, Verrall, before you ever had pointed it out to me!" foamed George. "There!"

Mr. Verrall raised his impassive eyebrows. "You must be aware—"

"Man!" interrupted George, his voice hoarse with emotion, as he grasped Mr. Verrall's shoulder: "do you know that the temptation, since you suggested it, is ever standing out before me—an ignis fatuus, beckoning me on to it! Though I know that it would prove nothing but a curse to engulf me."

"Here, George, take this," said Mr. Verrall, pouring out a large tumbler of sparkling wine, and forcing it upon him. "The worst of you is, that you get so excited over things! and then you are sure to look at them in a wrong light. Just hear me for a moment. The pressure is all at this present moment, is it not? If you can lift it, you will recover yourself fast enough. Has it ever struck you," Mr. Verrall added, somewhat abruptly, "that your brother is fading?"

Remembering the scene with his brother the previous night. George looked very conscious. He simply nodded an answer.

"With Ashlydyat yours, you would recover yourself almost immediately. There would positively be no risk."

"No risk!" repeated George, with emphasis.

"I cannot see that there would be any. Everything's a risk, if you come to that. We are in risk of earthquakes, of a national bankruptcy, of various other calamities: but the risk that would attend the step I

suggested to you is really so slight as not to be called a risk. It never can be known: the chances are a hundred thousand to one."

"But there remains the one," persisted George.

"To let an exposé come would be an act of madness, at the worst look out: but it is madness and double madness when you may so soon succeed to Ashlydyat."

"Oblige me by not counting upon that, Verrall," said George. "I hope, ill as my brother appears to be, that he may live yet."

"I don't wish to count upon it," returned Mr. Verrall. "It is for you to count upon it, not me. Were I in your place, I should not blind my eyes to the palpable fact. Look here: your object is to get out of this mess?"

"You know it is," said George.

"Very well. I see but one way for you to do it. The money must be raised, and how is that to be done? Why, by the means I suggest. It will never be known. A little time, and things can be worked round again."

"I have been hoping to work things round this long while," said George. "And they grow worse instead of better."

"Therefore I say that you should not close your eyes to the prospect of Ashlydyat. Sit down. Be yourself again, and let us talk things over quietly."

"You see, Verrall, the risk falls wholly upon me."

"And, upon whom the benefit, for which the risk will be incurred?" pointedly returned Mr. Verrall

"It seems to me that I don't get the lion's share of these benefits," was George's remark.

"Sit down, I say. Can't you be still? Here, take some more wine. There: now let us talk it over."

And talk it over they did, as may be inferred. For it was a full hour afterwards when George came out. He leaped into the cab, which had waited, telling the man that he must drive as if he were going through fire and water. The Man did so: and George arrived at the Paddington station just in time to lose his train.

Part 2. Chapter 7.

BEYOND RECALL.

The clerks were at a stand-still in the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. A certain iron safe had to be opened, and the key was not to be found. There were duplicate keys to it; one of them was kept by Mr. Godolphin, the other by Mr. George. Mr. Hurde, the cashier, appealed to Isaac Hastings.

"Do you think it has not been left with Mrs. George Godolphin?"

"I'll ask her," replied Isaac, getting off his stool. "I don't think it has: or she would have given it to me when she informed me of Mr. George Godolphin's absence."

He went into the dining-room: that pleasant room, which it was almost a shame to designate by the name. Maria was listlessly standing against the window-frame, plucking mechanically the fading blossoms of a geranium. She turned her head at the opening of the door, and saw her brother.

"Isaac, what time does the first train come in?"

"From what place?" inquired Isaac.

"Oh—from the Portsmouth direction. It was Portsmouth that Captain St. Aubyn was to embark from, was it not?"

"I don't know anything about it," replied Isaac. "Neither can I tell at what hours trains arrive from that direction. Maria, has Mr. George Godolphin left the key of the book-safe with you?"

"No," was Maria's answer. "I suppose he must have forgotten to do so. He has left it with me when he has gone away unexpectedly before, after banking-hours."

Isaac returned to the rest of the clerks. The key was wanted badly, and it was decided that he should go up to Ashlydyat for Mr. Godolphin's.

He took the nearest road to it. Down Crosse Street, and through the Ash-tree Walk. It was a place, as you have heard, especially shunned at night: it was not much frequented by day. Therefore, it was no surprise to Isaac Hastings that he did not, all through it, meet a single thing, either man or ghost. At the very end, however, on that same broken bench where Thomas Godolphin and his bodily agony had come to an anchor the previous night, sat Charlotte Pain.

She was in deep thought: deep perplexity; there was no mistaking that her countenance betrayed both: some might have fancied in deep pain, either bodily or mental. Pale she was not. Charlotte's complexion was made up too fashionably for either red or white, born of emotion, to affect it, unless it might be emotion of a most extraordinary nature. Hands clenched, brow knit, lips drawn from her teeth, eyes staring on vacancy—Isaac Hastings could not avoid reading the signs, and he read them with surprise.

"Good morning, Mrs. Pain!"

Charlotte started from the seat with a half scream. "What's the use of startling one like that!" she fiercely exclaimed.

"I did not startle you intentionally," replied Isaac. "You might have heard my footsteps had you not been so preoccupied. Did you think it was the ghost arriving?" he added, jestingly.

"Of course I did," returned Charlotte, laughing, as she made an effort, and a successful one, to recover herself. "What do you do here this morning? Did you come to look after the ghost, or after me?"

"After neither," replied Isaac, with more truth than gallantry. "Mr. George Godolphin has sent me up here."

Now, in saying this, what Isaac meant to express was nothing more than that his coming up was caused by George Godolphin. Alluding of course to George's forgetfulness in carrying off the key. Charlotte, however, took the words literally, and her eyes opened.

"Did George Godolphin not go last night?"

"Yes, he went. He forgot—"

"Then what can have brought him back so soon?" was her vehement interruption, not allowing Isaac time to conclude. "There's no day train in from London yet."

"Is there not?" was Isaac's rejoinder, looking keenly at her.

"Why, of course there's not: as you know, or ought to know. Besides, he could not get through the business he has gone upon and be back yet, unless he came by telegraph. He intended to leave by the eleven o'clock train from Paddington."

She spoke rapidly, thoughtlessly, in her surprise. Her inward thought was, that to have gone to London, and returned again since the hour at which she parted from him the previous night, one way, at least, must have been accomplished on the telegraph wires. Had she taken a moment for reflection, she would not have so spoken. However familiar she might be with the affairs of Mr. George Godolphin, so much the more reason was there for her shunning open allusion to them.

"Who told you Mr. George Godolphin had gone to London, Mrs. Pain?" asked Isaac, after a pause.

"Do you think I did not know it? Better than you, Mr. Isaac, clever and wise as you deem yourself."

"I pretend to be neither one nor the other with regard to the movements of Mr. George Godolphin," was the reply of Isaac. "It is not my place to be so. I heard he had only gone a stage or two towards Portsmouth with a sick friend, Of course if you know he has gone to London, that is a different matter. I can't stay now, Mrs. Pain: I have a message for Mr. Godolphin."

"Then he is not back again?" cried Charlotte, as Isaac was going through the turnstile.

Not yet."

Charlotte looked after him as he went out of sight, and bit her lips. A doubt was flashing over her—called up by Isaac's last observation—as to whether she had done right to allude to London. When George had been with her, discussing it, he had wondered what excuse he

should invent for taking the journey, and Charlotte never supposed but that it would be known. The bright idea of starting on a benevolent excursion towards Portsmouth, had been an after-thought of Mr. George's as he journeyed home.

"If I have done mischief," Charlotte was beginning slowly to murmur. But she threw back her head defiantly. "Oh, nonsense about mischief! What does it matter? George can battle it out."

Thomas Godolphin was at breakfast in his own room, his face, pale and worn, bearing traces of suffering. Isaac Hastings was admitted, and explained the cause of his appearance. Thomas received the news of George's absence with considerable surprise.

"He left me late last night—in the night, I may say—to return home. He said nothing then of his intention to be absent. Where do you say he has gone to?"

"Maria delivered a message to me, sir, from him, to the effect that he had accompanied a sick friend, Captain St. Aubyn, a few miles on the Portsmouth line," replied Isaac. "But Mrs. Pain, whom I have just met, says it is to London that he has gone; she says she knows it."

Thomas Godolphin made no further comment. It may not have pleased him to remark upon any information touching his brother furnished by Mrs. Charlotte Pain. He handed the key to Isaac, and said he should speedily follow him to the Bank. It had not been Thomas Godolphin's intention to go to the Bank that day, but hearing of George's absence-caused him to proceed thither. He ordered his carriage, and got there almost as soon as Isaac, bearing an invitation to Maria from Janet.

A quarter of an hour given to business in the manager's room, George's, and then Thomas Godolphin went to Maria. She was seated now near the window, in her pretty morning dress, engaged in some sort of fancy work. In her gentle face, her soft sweet eyes, Thomas would sometimes fancy he read a resemblance to his lost Ethel. Thomas greatly loved and esteemed Maria.

She rose to receive him, holding out her hand that he might take it as she quietly but earnestly made inquiries about his state of health. Not so well as he was yesterday, Thomas answered. He supposed

George had given her true account of their meeting the previous night, under the ash-trees, and of his, Thomas's illness.

Maria had not heard it. "How could George have been near the ash-trees last night?" she, wondering, inquired. "Do you mean last night, Thomas?"

"Yes, last night, after I left you. I was taken ill in going home—"

Miss Meta, who had been fluttering about the terrace, fluttered in to see who might be talking to her mamma, and interrupted the conclusion of the sentence. "Uncle Thomas! Uncle Thomas!" cried she joyously. They were great friends.

Her entrance diverted the channel of their conversation. Thomas took the child on his knee, fondly stroking her golden curls. Thomas remembered to have stroked just such golden curls on the head of his brother George, when he, George, was a little fellow of Meta's age.

"Janet bade me ask if you would go to Ashlydyat for the day, Maria" said he. "She—"

"Meta go too," put in the little quick tongue. "Meta go too, Uncle Thomas."

"Will Meta be good?—and not run away from Aunt Janet, and lose herself in the passages, as she did last time?" said Thomas, with a smile.

"Meta very good," was the answer, given with an oracular nod of promise. Thomas turned to Maria.

"Where is it that George has gone?" he asked. "With St. Aubyn? or to London?"

"Not to London," replied Maria. "He has gone with Captain St. Aubyn. What made you think of London?"

"Isaac said Mrs. Pain thought he had gone to London," replied Thomas. "It was some mistake, I suppose. But I wonder he should go

out to-day for anything less urgent than necessity. The Bank wants him."

Maria was soon to be convinced that she need not have spoken so surely about George's having gone with Captain St. Aubyn. When she and Meta, with Margery—who would have thought herself grievously wronged had she not been one of the party to Ashlydyat—were starting, Thomas came out of the Bank parlour and accompanied them to the door. While standing there, the porter of the Bell Inn happened to pass, and Maria stopped him to inquire whether Captain St. Aubyn was better when he left.

"He was not at all well, ma'am," was the man's answer: "hardly fit to travel. He had been in a sort of fever all the night."

"And my master, I suppose, must take and sit up with him!" put in Margery, without ceremony, in a resentful tone.

"No, he didn't," said the man, looking at Margery, as if he did not understand her. "It was my turn to be up last night, and I was in and out of his room four or five times: but nobody stayed with him."

"But Mr. George Godolphin went with Captain St. Aubyn this morning?" said Thomas Godolphin to the man.

"Went where, sir?"

"Started with him. On his journey."

"No, sir; not that I know of. I did not see him at the station."

Maria thought the man must be stupid. "Mr. George Godolphin returned to the Bell between eleven and twelve last night," she explained. "And he intended to accompany Captain St. Aubyn this morning on his journey."

"Mr. George was at the Bell for a few minutes just after eleven, ma'am. It was me that let him out. He did not come back again. And I don't think he was at the train this morning. I am sure he was hot with Captain St. Aubyn, for I never left the captain till the train started."

Nothing further was said to the porter. He touched his hat, and went his way. Maria's face wore an air of bewilderment. Thomas smiled at her.

"I think it is you who must be mistaken, Maria," said he. "Depend upon it, Mrs. Pain is right: he has gone to London."

"But why should he go to London without telling me?" debated Maria. "Why say he was going with Captain St. Aubyn?"

Thomas could offer no opinion upon the subject. Miss Meta began to stamp her pretty shoes, and to drag her mamma by the hand. She was impatient to depart.

They chose the way by the lonely Ash-tree Walk. It was pleasant on a sunny day: sunshine scares away ghosts: and it was also the nearest. As they were turning into it, they met Charlotte Pain. Maria, simple-hearted and straightforward, never casting a suspicion to—to anything undesirable—spoke at once of the uncertainty she was in, as to her husband.

"Why do you think he has gone to London?" she asked.

"I know he has," replied Charlotte. "He told me he was going there."

"But he told me he was only going with Captain St. Aubyn," returned Maria, a doubtful sound in her voice.

"Oh, my dear, gentlemen do not find it always convenient to keep their wives au courant of their little affairs."

Had it been salvation to her, Charlotte could not have helped launching that shaft at Maria Godolphin. No; not even regard for George's secrets stopped her. She had done the mischief by speaking to Isaac, and this opportunity was too glorious to be missed, so she braved it out. Had Charlotte dared—for her own sake—she could have sent forth an unlimited number of poisoned arrows daily at George Godolphin's wife: and she-would have relished the sport amazingly. She sailed off: a curiously conspicuous smile of triumph in her eyes as they were bent on Maria, her parting movement being a graciously condescending nod to the child.

Maria was recalled to her senses by Margery. The woman was gazing after Charlotte with a dark, strange look: a look that Maria understood as little as she understood Charlotte's triumphant one. Margery caught the eye of her mistress upon her, and smoothed her face with a short cough.

"I'm just taking the pattern of her jacket, ma'am. It matches so bravely with the hat. I wonder what the world will come to next? The men will take to women's clothes, I suppose, now the women have taken to men's."

Mr. George—as you may remember—missed his train. And Mr. George debated whether he should order a special. Two reasons withheld him. One was, that his arriving at Prior's Ash by a special train might excite comment; the other, that a special train was expensive; and of late Mr. George Godolphin had not had any too much ready money to spare. He waited for the next ordinary train, and that deposited him at Prior's Ash at seven o'clock.

He proceeded home at once. The Bank was closed for the evening. Pierce admitted his master, who went into the dining-room. No sign of dinner; no signs of occupation.

"My mistress is at Ashlydyat, sir. She went up this morning with Miss Meta and Margery. You would like dinner, sir, would you not?"

"I don't much care for it," responded George. "Anything will do. Has Mr. Godolphin been at the Bank to-day?"

"Yes, sir. He has been here all day, I think?"

George went into the Bank parlour, then to other of the business rooms. He was looking about for letters: he was looking at books: altogether he seemed to be busy. Presently he came out and called Pierce.

"I want a light."

Pierce brought it. "I shall be engaged here for half an hour," said his master. "Should any one call, I cannot be disturbed: under any pretence, you understand."

"Very well, sir," replied Pierce, as he withdrew. And George locked the intervening door between the house and the Bank, and took out the key.

He turned into a passage and went diving down a few stairs, the light in his hand; selected one of several keys which he had brought with him, and opened the door of a dry-vaulted room. It was the strong-room of the Bank, secure and fireproof.

"Safe number three, on right," he read, consulting a bit of paper on which he had copied down the words in pencil upstairs. "Number three? Then it must be this one."

Taking another of the keys, he put it into the lock. Turned it, and turned it, and—could not open the lock. George snatched it out, and read the label. "Key of safe number two."

"What an idiot I am! I have brought the wrong key!"

He went up again, grumbling at his stupidity, opened the cupboard where the keys were kept, and looked for the right one. Number three was the one he wanted. And number three was not there.

George stood transfixed. He had custody of the keys. No other person had the power of approaching the place they were guarded in: except his brother. Had the Bank itself disappeared, George Godolphin could not have been much more astonished than at the disappearance of this key. Until this moment, this discovery of its absence, he would have been ready to swear that there it was, before all the judges in the land.

He tossed the keys here; he tossed them there; little heeding how he misplaced them. George became convinced that the Fates were dead against him, in spiriting away, just because he wanted it, this particular key. That no one could have touched it except Thomas, he knew: and why he should have done so, George could not imagine. He could not imagine where it was, or could be, at the present moment. Had Thomas required it to visit the safe, he was far too exact, too methodical, not to return it to its place again.

A quarter of an hour given to hunting, to thinking—and the thinking was not entirely agreeable thinking—and George gave it up in despair.

“ I must wait until to-morrow,” was his conclusion. “ If Thomas has carried it away with him, through forgetfulness, he will find it out and replace it then.”

He was closing the cupboard door, when something arrested it on its lower shelf, so that it would not close. Bringing the light inside he found—the missing key. George himself must have dropped it there on first opening the cupboard. With a suppressed shout of delight he snatched it up. A shout of delight! Better that George Godolphin had broken into a wail of lamentation! Another moment, and he was going down the stairs to the strong-room, key in hand.

Safe number three, on the right, was unlocked without trouble now. In that safe there were some tin boxes, on one of which was inscribed “Lord Averil.” Selecting another and a smaller key from those he held, George opened this.

It was full of papers. George looked them rapidly over with the quick eye of one accustomed to the work, and drew forth one of them. Rather a bulky parcel, some writing upon it. This he thrust into his pocket, and began putting the rest in order. Had a mirror been held before him at that moment, it would have reflected a face utterly colourless. He returned to the office.

Enclosing the packet in a stout envelope, which he directed, he went out, and dropped it into the post-office at the opposite corner of Crosse Street. Very soon he was on his way to Lady Godolphin’s Folly, bearing with him the small parcel— sent by Mrs. Verrall—a sufficient excuse for calling there, had George required an excuse. Which he did not.

It was a light night; as it had been the previous night, though the moon was not yet very high. He gained the turnstile at the end of the Ash-tree Walk—where he had been startled by the apparition of Thomas, and where Isaac Hastings had seen Charlotte Pain that morning—and turned into the open way to the right. A few paces more, and he struck into the narrow pathway which would lead him

through the grove of trees, leaving Ashlydyat and its approaches to the left.

Did George Godolphin love the darkness, that he should choose that way? Last night and again to-night he had preferred it. It was most unusual for any one to approach the Folly by that obscure path. A few paces round, and he would have skirted the thicket, would have gone on to the Folly in the bright, open moonlight. Possibly George scarcely noticed that he chose it full of thought, was he, just then.

He went along with his head down. What were his reflections? Was he wishing that he could undo the deeds of the last hour—replace in that tin case what he had taken from it? Was he wishing that he could undo the deeds of the last few years—be again a man without a cloud on his brow, a heavier cloud on his heart? It was too late: he could recall neither the one nor the other. The deed was already on its way to London; the years had rolled into the awful PAST, with its doings, bad and good, recorded on high.

What was that? George lifted his head and his ears. A murmur of suppressed voices, angry voices, too, sounded near him, in one of which George thought he recognized the tones of Charlotte Pain. He went through to an intersecting path, so narrow that one person could with difficulty walk down it, just as a scream rang out on the night air.

Panting, scared, breathless, her face distorted with fear or passion, as much as George could see of it in the shaded light, her gauze dress torn by every tree with which it came in contact, flying down the narrow pathway, came Charlotte Pain. And—unless George Godolphin was strangely mistaken—some one else was flying in equal terror in the opposite direction, as if they had just parted.

“Charlotte! What is it? Who has alarmed you?”

In the moment’s first impulse he caught hold of her to protect her; in the second, he loosed his hold, and made after the other fugitive. The impression upon George’s mind was, that some one, perhaps a stranger had met Charlotte, and frightened her with rude words.

But Charlotte was as swift as he. She flung her hands around George, and held him there. Strong hands they always were: doubly

strong in that moment of agitation. George could not unclasp them: unless he had used violence.

"Stay where you are! Stay where you are, for the love of Heaven!" he gasped. "You must not go."

"What is all this? What is the matter?" he asked in surprise.

She made no other answer. She clung to him with all her weight of strength, her arms and hands straining with the effort, reiterating wildly, "You must not go! you must not go!"

"Nay, I don't care to go," replied George: "it was for your sake I was following. Be calm, Charlotte: there's no necessity for this agitation."

She went on, down the narrow pathway, drawing him with her. The broader path gained—though that also was but a narrow one—she put her arm within his, and turned towards the house. George could see her white frightened face better now, and all the tricks and cosmetics invented could not hide its ghastliness; he felt her heating pulses; he heard her beating heart.

Bending down to her, he spoke with a soothing whisper. "Tell me what it was that terrified you."

She would not answer. She only pressed his arm with a tighter pressure, lest he might break from her again in pursuit; she hurried onwards with a quicker step. Skirting round the trees, which before the house made a half circle, Charlotte came to the end, and then darted rapidly across the lawn to the terrace and into the house by one of the windows. He followed her.

Her first movement was to close the shutters and bar them: her next to sit down on the nearest chair. Ill as she looked, George could scarcely forbear a smile at her gauze dress: the bottom of its skirt was in shreds.

"Will you let me get you something, Charlotte? Or ring for it?"

"I don't want anything," she answered. "I shall be all right directly. How could you frighten me so?"

"I frighten you!" returned George. "It was not I who frightened you."

"Indeed it was. You and no one else. Did you not hear me scream?"

"I did."

"It was at you, rustling through the trees," persisted Charlotte. "I had gone out to see if the air would relieve this horrid headache, which has been upon me since last night and won't go away. I strolled into the thicket, thinking all sorts of lonely things, never suspecting that you or any one else could be near me. I wonder I did not faint, as well as scream."

"Charlotte, what nonsense! You were whispering angrily with some one; some one who escaped in the opposite direction. Who was it?"

"I saw no one; I heard no one. Neither was I whispering."

He looked at her intently. That she was telling an untruth he believed, for he felt positive that some second person had been there. "Why did you stop me, then, when I would have gone in pursuit?"

"It was your fault for attempting to leave me," was Charlotte's answer. "I would not have remained alone for a house full of gold."

"I suppose it is some secret. I think, whatever it may be, Charlotte, you might trust me." He spoke significantly, a stress on the last word. Charlotte rose from her seat.

"So I would," she said, "were there anything to confide. Just look at me! My dress is ruined?"

"You should take it up if you go amidst clumsy trees, whose rough trunks nearly meet." -

"I had it up—until you came," returned Charlotte, jumping upon a chair that she might survey it in one of the side glasses. "You startled me so that I dropped it. I might have it joined, and a lace flounce put upon it," she mused. "It cost a great deal of money, did this dress, I can tell you, Mr. George."

She jumped off the chair again, and George produced the packet confided to him by Mrs. Verrall.

"I promised her that you should have it to-night," he said. "Hence my unfortunate appearance here, which it seems has so startled you."

"Oh, that's over now. When did you get back again?"

"By the seven o'clock train. I saw Verrall."

"Well?"

"It's not well. It's ill. Do you know what I begin to suspect at times?—That Verrall and every one else is playing me false. I am sick of the world."

"No, he is not, George. If I thought he were, I'd tell you so. I would, on my sacred word of honour. It is not likely that he is. When we are in a bilious mood, everything wears to us a jaundiced tinge. You are in one to-night."

Part 2. Chapter 8.

THE TRADITION OF THE DARK PLAIN.

It is the province of little demoiselles to be naughty: it is their delight to make promises and then break them, all false and fearless—as they may do over other affairs in later life. Miss Meta Godolphin was no exception to the rule. She had gravely promised her uncle Thomas to be a good girl, and not run away to be lost in unfrequented passages; yet no sooner had the young lady arrived at Ashlydyat that morning, and been released of her out-door things by Margery, than with a joyously defiant laugh that would have rejoiced the heart of Charlotte Pain, she flew off to that forbidden spot—the unused passages. Had the little lady's motive been laid bare, it might have been found to consist simply in the enjoyment of a thing forbidden. Truth to say, Miss Meta was very prone to be disobedient to all persons, excepting one. That one was her mother. Maria had never spoken a sharp word to the child in her life, or used a sharp tone: but she had contrived to train the little one to obey, as well as to love. George, Margery, Mrs. Hastings, Miss Meta would openly disobey, and laugh in their faces while she did it: her mother, never. Meta remembered a scolding she received on the last visit she had paid to Ashlydyat, touching the remote passages—she had never found them out until then—and apparently the reminiscence of the scolding was so agreeable that she was longing to have it repeated.

"Now," said Margery, as she concluded the young lady's toilette, "you'll not go up to those old rooms and passages to-day, mind, Miss Meta!"

For answer, Miss Meta shook out her golden curls, laughed triumphantly, and started off to the passages then and there. Maria had never said to her, "You must not go near these passages;" and the commands of the rest of the world went for nothing. Margery remained in blissful ignorance of the disobedience. She supposed the child had run to her mother and the Miss Godolphins. The objection to Meta's being in the passages alone had no mysterious element in it. It proceeded solely from a regard to her personal safety. The staircase leading to the turret was unprotected; the loopholes in the turret were open, and a fall from either might cost the young lady her life. These places, the unfrequented passages at the back of the

second storey, and the staircase leading to the square turret above them, were shut in by a door, which separated them from the inhabited part of the house. This door Miss Meta had learned to open: and away she went, as fancy led her.

Maria was in Miss Godolphin's room, talking to that lady and to Bessy, when a sound overhead caused them to pause.

"Where's Meta?" cried Janet, hastening from the room. "She cannot have gone upstairs again! Margery! Where's the child?"

Margery at that moment happened to be putting the finishing touches to her own toilette. She came flying without her cap out of one of the many narrow passages and windings which intersected each other on that floor. "The child went off to you, ma'am, as soon as I had put on her pinafore."

"Then, Margery, she has gone up into the turret. She never came to us."

Up to the turret hastened Janet; up to the turret followed Margery. Bessy and Maria traversed the passage leading to the turret-stairs, and stood there, looking upwards. Maria, had she been alone, could not have told which of the passages would lead her to the turret-stairs; and she could not understand why so much commotion need be made, although Meta had run up there. Strange as it may seem, Maria Godolphin, though so many years George's wife, and the presumptive mistress of Ashlydyat, had never passed beyond that separating door. Miss Godolphin had never offered to take her to the unused rooms and the turret; and Maria was of too sensitively refined a nature to ask it of her own accord.

Janet appeared, leading the rebel; Margery, behind, was scolding volubly. "Now," said Janet, when they reached the foot, "tell me, Meta, how it was that you could behave so disobediently, and go where you had been expressly told not to go?"

Meta shook back her golden curls with a laugh, sprang to Maria, and took refuge in her skirts. "Mamma did not tell me not to go," said she.

Janet looked at Maria: almost as if she would say, Can it be true that you have not done so?

It is true," said Maria, answering the look. "I heard something about her running into the turret the last time she was here: I did not know it was of any consequence."

"She might fall through the loopholes," replied Janet. "Nothing could save her from being dashed to pieces."

Maria caught the child to her with an involuntary movement. "Meta, darling, do you hear? You must never go again."

Meta looked up fondly, serious now. Maria bent her face down on the little upturned one.

"Never again, darling; do not forget," she murmured. "Does Meta know that if harm came to her, mamma would never look up again? She would cry always."

Meta bustled out of her mamma's arms, and stood before Miss Godolphin, earnest decision on her little face. "Aunt Janet, Meta won't run away again."

And when the child voluntarily made a promise, they knew that she would keep it. Margery whirled her away, telling her in high tones of a young lady of her own age who would do something that she was bade not to do: the consequence of which act was, that the next time she went out for a walk, she was run at by a bull with brass tips on his horns.

"Is the turret really dangerous?" inquired Maria.

"It is dangerous for a random child like Meta, who ventures into every hole and corner without reference to dust or danger," was Miss Godolphin's answer. "Would you like to go up, Maria?"

"Yes, I should. I have heard George speak of the view from it."

"Mind, Maria, the stairs are narrow and winding," interposed Bessy.

Nevertheless, they went up, passing the open loopholes which might be dangerous to Meta. The first thing that Maria's eyes encountered when they had reached the top was a small bow of violet-coloured ribbon. She stooped to pick it up.

"It is a bow off Janet's evening dress," exclaimed Bessy. "Janet" — turning to her sister — "what can have brought it here?"

"I was up here last night," was the answer of Janet Godolphin, spoken with composure.

"That's just like you, Janet I" retorted Bessy. "To watch for that foolish Shadow, I suppose."

"Not to watch for it. To see it."

Bessy was afflicted with a taint of heresy. They had never been able to imbue her with the superstition pertaining to the Godolphins. Bessy had seen the Shadow more than once with her own eyes; but they were practical eyes and not imaginative, and could not be made see anything mysterious in it. "The shadow is thrown by some tree or other," Bessy would say. And, in spite of its being pointed out to her that there was no tree, which could cast a shadow on the spot, Bessy obstinately held to her own opinion.

Maria gazed from two sides of the turret. The view from both was magnificent. The one side overlooked the charming open country; the other, Prior's Ash. On the third side rose Lady Godolphin's Folly, standing out like a white foreground to the lovely expanse of scenery behind it; the fourth side looked upon the Dark Plain.

"There's Charlotte Pain," said Bessy.

Charlotte had returned home, it appeared, since Maria met her, and changed her attire. She was pacing the terrace of the Folly in her riding-habit, a whip in hand, and some dogs surrounding her. Maria turned towards the Dark Plain, and gazed upon it.

"Is it true," she timidly asked, "that the Shadow has been there for the last night or two?"

Janet answered the question by asking another. "Who told you it was there, Maria?"

"I heard Margery say so."

"Margery?" repeated Janet. "That woman appears to know by instinct when the Shadow Comes. She dreams it, I think. It is true, Maria, that it has appeared again," she continued, in a tone of unnatural composure. "I never saw it so black as it was last night."

"Do you believe that there can be anything in it—that it foretells ill?" asked Maria.

"I know that it is the tradition handed down with our house: I know that, in my own experience, the Shadow never came but it brought ill," was the reply of Miss Godolphin.

"What caused the superstition to arise in the first instance?" asked Maria.

"Has George never told you the tale?" replied Janet.

"Never. He says he does not remember it clearly enough. Will you not tell it me, Janet?"

Janet hesitated. "One of the early Godolphins brought a curse upon the house," she at length began, in a low tone. "It was that evil ancestor whose memory we would bury, were it possible; he who earned for himself the title of the Wicked Godolphin. He killed his wife by a course of gradual and long-continued ill-treatment. He wanted her out of the way that another might fill her place. He pretended to have discovered that she was not worthy: than which assertion nothing could be more false and shameless, for she was one of the best ladies ever created. She was a de Commins, daughter of the warrior Richard de Commins, and was brave as she was good. She died; and the Wicked Godolphin turned her coffin out of the house on to the Dark Plain; there" —pointing to the open space before the archway—"to remain until, the day of interment. But he did not wait for that day of interment to bring home his second wife."

"Not wait!" exclaimed Maria, her eager ears drinking in the story.

"The habits in those early days will scarcely admit of allusion to them in these," continued Janet: "they savour of what is worse than barbarism—sin. The father, Richard de Commins, heard of his child's death, and hastened to Ashlydyat, arriving by moonlight. The first sounds he encountered were the revels of the celebration of the second marriage; the first sight he saw was the coffin of his daughter on the open plain, covered by a pall, two of her faithful women bending, the one at the head, the other at the foot, mourning the dead. While he halted there, kneeling in prayer, it was told to the Wicked Godolphin that de Commins had arrived. He—that Wicked Godolphin— rushed madly out and drew his sword upon him as he knelt. De Commins was wounded, but not mortally, and he rose to defend himself. A combat ensued, de Commins having no resource but to fight, and he was killed; murdered. Weary with his journey, enfeebled by age, weakened by grief, his foot slipped, and the Wicked Godolphin, stung to fury by the few words of reproach de Commins had had time to speak, deliberately ran him through as he lay. In the moment of death, de Commins cursed the Godolphins, and prophesied that the shadow of his daughter's bier, as it appeared then, should 'remain as a curse upon the Godolphins' house for ever."

"But do you believe the story?" cried Maria, breathlessly.

"How much of it may be true, how much of it addition, I cannot decide," said Janet. "One fact is indisputable: that a shadow, bearing the exact resemblance of a bier, with a mourner at its head and another at its foot, does appear capriciously on that Dark Plain; and that it never yet showed itself, but some grievous ill followed for the Godolphins. It is possible that the Shadow may have partially given rise to the story."

"Janet!" cried Maria, leaning forward, her own tones hushed, "is it possible that one, in dying, can curse a whole generation, so that the curse shall take effect in the future?"

"Hush, child!" rebuked Janet. "It does not become us to inquire into these things. Controversy about them is utterly useless, worse than profitless; for there will be believers and unbelievers to the end of time. You wished me to tell you the story, Maria, and I have done so. I do no more. I do not tell you it is to be believed, or it is not to be believed. Let every one decide for himself, according as his reason, his instinct, or his judgment shall prompt him. People accuse me of

being foolishly superstitious touching this Shadow and these old traditions. I can only say the superstition has been forced upon me by experience. When the Shadow appears, I cannot close my eyes to it and say, 'It is not there.' It is there: and all I do is to look at it, and speculate. When the evil, which invariably follows the appearance of the Shadow, falls, I cannot close my heart to it, and say, in the teeth of facts, 'No evil has happened.' The Shadow never appeared, Maria, but it brought ill in its wake. It is appearing again now: and I am as certain that some great ill is in store for us, as that I am talking to you at this moment. On this point I am superstitious."

"It is a long time, is it not, since the Shadow last appeared?"

"It is years. But I have not quite finished the story," resumed Janet. "The Wicked Godolphin killed Richard de Commins, and buried him that night on the Dark Plain. In his fury and passion he called his servants around him, ordered a grave to be dug, and assisted with his own hands. De Commins was put into it without the rites of burial. Tradition runs that so long as the bones remain unfound, the place will retain the appearance of a graveyard. They have been often searched for. That tragedy, no doubt, gave its name to the place— The Dark Plain.' It cannot be denied that the place does wear much the appearance of a graveyard: especially by moonlight."

"It is only the effect of the low gorse bushes," said Bessy. "They grow in a peculiar form. I know I would have those bushes rooted up, were I master of Ashlydyat!"

"Your father had it done, Bessy, and they sprang up again," replied Janet. "You must remember it,"

"It could not have been done effectually," was Bessy's answer. "Papa must have had lazy men at work, who left the roots in. I would dig it all up and make a ploughed field of it."

"Did he do any other harm—that Wicked Godolphin?" asked Maria.

"He! Other harm!" reiterated Janet, something like indignation at Maria's question mingling with surprise in her tone. "Don't you know that it was he who gambled away Ashlydyat? After that second marriage of his, he took to worse and worse courses. It was said that his second wife proved a match for him, and they lived

together like two evil demons. All things considered, it was perhaps a natural sequence that they should so live," added Janet, severely. "And in the end he cut off the entail and gambled away the estate. Many years elapsed before the Godolphins could recover it."

Maria was longing to put a question. She had heard that there were other superstitious marvels attaching to Ashlydyat, but she scarcely liked to mention them to the Miss Godolphins. George never would explain anything: he always turned it off with laughing raillery.

"You—think—that Ashlydyat will pass away from the Godolphins, Janet?"

Janet shook her head. "We have been reared in the belief," she answered. "That the estate is to pass finally away from them, the Godolphins have been taught to fear ever since that unhappy time. Each generation, as they have come into possession, have accepted it as an uncertain tenure: as a thing that might last them for their time, or might pass away from them ere their earthly sojourn was completed. The belief was; nay, the tradition was; that so long as a reigning Godolphin held by Ashlydyat, Ashlydyat would hold by him and his. My father was the first to break it."

Janet had taken up her dress, and sat down on a dusty, faded bench, the only article of furniture of any description that the square room contained. That strangely speculative look—it was scarcely an earthly one—had come into her eyes: and though she answered when spoken to, she appeared to be lost in sad, inward thought. Maria, somewhat awed with the turn the conversation had taken, with the words altogether, stood against the opposite window, her delicate hands clasped before her, her face slightly bent forward, pale and grave.

"Then, do you fear that the end for the Godolphins is at hand?"

"I seem to see that it is," replied Janet. "I have looked for it ever since my father left Ashlydyat. I might say— but that I should be laughed at more than I am for an idealist—that the strangers to whom he resigned it in his place, would have some bearing upon our fall, would in sonic way conduce to it. I think of these things ever," continued Janet, almost as if she would apologize for the wildness of the confession. "They seem to unfold themselves to me, to become

clear and more clear: to be no longer fanciful fears darting across the brain, but realities of life."

Maria's lips slightly parted as she listened. "But the Verralls have left Ashlydyat a long while?" she presently said.

"I know they have. But they were usurpers here for the time. Better—as I believe—that nay father had shut it up: better, far better, that he had never left it! He knew it also: and it preyed upon him on his death-bed."

"Oh, Janet! the ill may not come in our time!"

"It may not. I am anxious to believe it may not, in defiance of the unalterable conviction that has seated itself within me. Let it pass, Maria; talking of it will not avert it: indeed, I do not know how I came to be betrayed into speaking of it openly."

"But you have not told me about the sounds in the passages?" urged Maria, as Janet rose from her dusty seat.

"There is nothing more to tell. Peculiar sounds, as if caused by the wind, are heard. Moaning, sighing, rushing—the passages at times seem alive with them. It is said to come as a reminder to the Godolphins of a worse sound that will sometime be heard, when Ashlydyat shall be passing away from them."

"But you don't believe that?" uttered Maria.

"Child, I can scarcely tell you what I believe," was Janet's answer. "I can only pray that the one-half of what my heart prompts me to fear, may never take place in reality. That the noise does come, and without any apparent cause, is not a matter of belief, or disbelief: it is a fact, patent to all who have inhabited Ashlydyat. The Verralls can tell you so: they have had their rest broken by it."

"And it is not caused by the wind?"

Janet shook her head in dissent. "It has come on the calmest and stillest night, when there has not been a breath of air to move the leaves of the ash-trees."

Bessy turned from her pastime of watching Charlotte Pain: she had taken little part in the conversation.

"I wonder at you, Janet. You will be setting Maria against Ashlydyat. She will be frightened to come into it, should it lapse to George."

Maria looked at her with a smile. "I should have no fear with him, superstitious or otherwise. If George took me to live in the catacombs, I could be brave with him."

Ever the same blind faith: the unchanged love for her husband. Better, far better, that it should be so!

"For nay part, I am content to take life and its good as I find it, and not waste nay time in unprofitable dreams," was the practical remark of Bessy. "If any ill is to come, it must come; but there's no need to look out for it beforehand."

"There must be dreamers and there must be workers," answered Janet, picking her way down the winding stairs. "We were not all born into the world with minds similarly constituted, or to fulfil the same parts in life."

The day passed on. Thomas Godolphin came home in the evening to dinner, and said George had not returned. Maria wondered. It grew later. Margery went home with Meta: who thought she was very hardly used at having to go home before her mamma.

"I had rather you would stay, Maria," Thomas said to her. "I particularly wish to say a word to George to-night on business matters: if he finds you are here when he returns, he will come up."

George did find so—as you already know. And when he left Mrs. Charlotte Pain, her torn dress and her other attractions, he bent his steps towards Ashlydyat. But, instead of going the most direct road to it, he took his way through the thicket where he had had the encounter an hour ago with Charlotte. There was a little spice of mystery about it which excited Mr. George's curiosity. That some one had parted from her he felt convinced, in spite of her denial. And that she was in a state of excitement, of agitation, far beyond anything he had ever witnessed in Charlotte Pain, was indisputable. George's thoughts went back, naturally, to the previous night: to the

figure he had seen, and whom his eyes, his conviction, had told him was Charlotte. She had positively denied it, had said she had not quitted the drawing-room: and George had found her there, apparently composed and stationary. Nevertheless, though he had then yielded to her word, he began now to suspect that his own conviction had been correct: that the dark and partially disguised figure had been no other than Charlotte herself. It is probable that, however powerful was the hold Charlotte's fascinations may have taken upon the senses of Mr. George Godolphin, his trust in her, in her truth and single-heartedness, was not of the most perfect nature. What mystery was connected with Charlotte, or whom she met in the thicket, or whether she met any one or no one, she best knew. George's curiosity was sufficiently excited upon the point to induce him to walk with a slow step and searching eyes, lest haply he might come upon some one or something which should explain the puzzle.

How runs the old proverb? "A watched-for visitor never comes." In vain George halted and listened; in vain he peered into every part of the thicket within view. Not a step was to be heard, not a creature to be seen: and he emerged from the trees ungratified. Crossing the open grass by the turnstile he turned round by the ash-trees, to the Dark Plain.

Turned and started. George Godolphin's thoughts had been on other things than the Shadow. The Shadow lay there, so pre-eminently dark, so menacing, that George positively started. Somehow—fond as he was of ignoring the superstition—George Godolphin did not like its look to-night.

Upon entering Ashlydyat, his first interview was with Thomas. They remained for a few minutes alone. Thomas had business affairs to speak of: and George—it is more than probable—made some good excuse for his day's absence. That it would be useless to deny he had been to London, he knew. Charlotte had put him on his guard. Janet and Bessy asked innumerable questions of him when he joined then, on the score of his absence; but he treated it in his usual light manner, contriving to tell them nothing. Maria did not say a word then: she left it till they should be alone.

"You will tell me, George, will you not?" she gently said, as they were walking home together.

"Tell you what, Maria?"

"Oh, George, you know what" —and her tone, as Mr. George's ears detected, bore its sound of pain. "If you were going to London when you left me; why did you deceive me by saying you were going elsewhere?"

"You goose! Do you suppose I said it to deceive you?"

There was a lightness, an untruthfulness in his words, in his whole air and manner, which struck with the utmost pain upon Maria's heart. "Why did you say it?" was all she answered.

"Maria, I'll tell you the truth," said he, becoming serious and confidential. "I wanted to run up to town on a little pressing matter of business, and I did not care that it should become known in the Bank. Had I known that I should be away for the day, of course I should have told Thomas: but I fully intended to be home in the afternoon: therefore I said nothing about it. I missed the train, or I should have been home in due time."

"You might have told me," she sighed. "I would have kept your counsel."

"So I would, had I thought you deemed it of any consequence," replied George.

Consequence! Maria walked on a few minutes in silence, her arm lying very spiritless within her husband's. "If you did not tell me," she resumed, in a low tone, "why did you tell Mrs. Pain?"

"Mrs. Pain's a donkey," was George's rejoinder. And it is probable Mr. George at that moment was thinking her one: for his tone in its vexation, was real enough. "My business was connected with Verrall, and I dropped a hint, in the hearing of Mrs. Pain, that I might probably follow him to town. At any rate, I am safe home again, Maria, so no great harm has come of my visit to London," he concluded, in a gayer tone.

"What time did you get in?" she asked.

"By the seven o'clock train."

"The seven o'clock train!" she repeated in surprise. "And have only now come up to Ashlydyat!"

"I found a good many things to do after I got home," was the rejoinder.

"Did you see Meta? Margery took her home at eight o'clock."

Mr. George Godolphin had not seen Meta. Mr. George could have answered, had it so pleased him, that before the child reached home, he had departed on his evening visit to Lady Godolphin's Folly.

Part 2. Chapter 9.

THE DEAD ALIVE AGAIN.

Saturday was a busy day at Prior's Ash; it was a busy day at the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Country towns and country banks are always more busy on a market-day.

George Godolphin sat in the manager's room, full of business. Not much more than a week had elapsed since that visit of his to London; and it was now Thomas's turn to be away. Thomas had gone to town. His errand there was to consult one of the first surgeons of the day, on the subject of his own health. Not so much that he had hope from the visit, as that it would be a satisfaction to his family to have made it.

George Godolphin was full of business. Full of talking also. A hearty country client, one who farmed a large number of acres, and generally kept a good round sum in the Bank's coffers, was with him. What little point of business he had had occasion to see one of the partners upon, was concluded, and he and George were making merry together, enjoying a gossip as to the state of affairs in general and in particular, out of doors and in. Never a man more free from care (if appearances might be trusted) than George Godolphin! When that hearty, honest farmer went forth, he would have been willing to testify that, of carking care, George possessed none.

As he went on, George sat down and bent over sonic account-books. His face had changed. Lines, of what looked worse than care, grew out upon it, and he lifted his hand to his brow with a weary gesture. Another minute, and he was interrupted again. He had very little peace on a market-day.

"Lord Averil wishes to see you, sir," said one of the clerks. It was Isaac Hastings.

To any other announced name, George Godolphin's ready answer would have been, "Show him in." To that of Lord Averil he evidently hesitated, and a sudden flush dyed his face. Isaac, keen in observation as was his father, as was his sister Grace, noticed it. To him, it looked like a flush of shrinking fear.

"Did he ask for me?"

"He asked for Mr. Godolphin, sir. He says it will be the same thing if he sees you. Shall I show him in?"

"Of course," replied George. "What do you stop for?" he angrily added.

He rose from his seat; he put a chair or two in place; he turned to the table, and laid rapidly some of its papers one upon another—all in a fuss and bustle not in the least characteristic of George Godolphin. Isaac thought he must have lost his usual presence of mind. As to the reproach addressed to himself, "What do you stop for?"—it had never been the custom to show clients into the presence of the partners without first asking for permission.

Lord Averil came in. George, only in that short time, had become himself again. They chatted a minute on passing topics, and Lord Averil mentioned that he had not known, until then, that Mr. Godolphin was in London.

"He went up on Thursday," observed George. "I expect he will be back early in the week."

"I intend to be in London myself next week," said Lord Averil. "Will it be convenient for me to have those bonds of mine to-day?" he continued.

A sudden coursing on of all George's pulses; a whirling rush in his brain. "Bonds?" he mechanically answered.

"The bonds of that stock which your father bought for me years ago," explained Lord Averil. "They were deposited here for security:

Don't you know it?"—looking at George's countenance, which seemed to speak only of perplexity. "Mr. Godolphin would know."

"Oh yes, yes," replied George, regaining his breath and his courage. "It is all right; I did not remember for the moment. Of course—the deposited bonds."

"I am thinking of selling out," said Lord Averil. "Indeed, I have been for some time thinking of it, but have idly put it off. If it would be quite convenient to give me the bonds, I would take them to town with me. I shall go up on Monday or Tuesday."

Now, George Godolphin, rally your wits! What are you to answer? George did rally them, in a lame manner. Confused words, which neither he nor Lord Averil precisely understood—to the effect that in Thomas Godolphin's absence, he, George, did not know exactly where to put his hand upon the securities—came forth. So Lord Averil courteously begged him not to take any trouble about it. He would leave them until another opportunity.

He shook hands cordially with George, and went out, with a mental comment, "Not half the man of business that his brother is, and his, father was, but wondrously like Cecil!" George watched the door close. He wiped the dewdrops which had gathered on his face; he looked round with the beseeching air of one seeking relief from some intense pain. Had Lord Averil persisted in his demand, what would have remained for him? Those are the moments in which man has been tempted to resort to the one irredeemable sin.

The door opened again, and George gave a gasp as one in agony. It was only Isaac Hastings. "Mr. Horde wishes to know, sir, whether those bills are to go up to Glyn's to-day or Monday?"

"They had better go to-day," replied George. "Has Mr. Barnaby been in to-day?" he added, as Isaac was departing.

"Not yet."

"If he does not come soon, some one must go down to the corn market to him. He is sure to be there. That is, if he is in town to-day."

"I know he is in town," replied Isaac. "I saw him as I was coming back from dinner. He was talking to Mr. Verrall."

"To Mr. Verrall!" almost shouted George, looking up as it electrified into life. "Is he back again?"

"He is back again, sir. I think he had only then arrived. He was coming from towards the railway station."

"You are sure it was Mr. Verrall?" reiterated George.

Isaac Hastings smiled. What could make Mr. George Godolphin so eager? "I am sure it was Mr. Verrall."

George felt as if a whole ton weight of care had been lifted from him. He had been so long in the habit of flying to Mr. Verrall in his difficulties, that it seemed to him he would only have to go to him, to remedy the one hanging over him now. Mr. Verrall had generally accomplished the task as men of his profession do accomplish such tasks—by laying up an awful day of reckoning for the future. That day was not now far off for George Godolphin.

The Bank closed later on Saturdays, and George remained at his post to the end. Then he dined. Then, at the dusk hour—nay, at the hour of darkness, he went out to Lady Godolphin's Folly. Why was it that he rarely went to the Folly now, except under the covert shades of night? Did he fear people might comment on his intimacy with Mr. Verrall, and seek a clue to its cause? Or did he fear the world's gossip on another score?

George arrived at Lady Godolphin's Folly, and was admitted to an empty room. "Mr. Verrall had returned, and had dined with Mrs. Pain, but had gone out after dinner," the servant said. He had believed Mrs. Pain to be in the drawing-room. Mrs. Pain was evidently not there, in spite of the man's searching eyes. He looked into the next room, with similar result.

"Perhaps, sir, she has stepped out on the terrace with her dogs?" observed the man.

George—ungallant as he was!—cared not where Mrs. Pain might have stepped at that present moment: his anxiety was for Mr. Verrall. "Have you any idea when your master will be in?" he inquired of the servant.

"I don't think he'll be long, sir. I heard him say he was tired, and should go to bed early. He may have gone to Ashlydyat. He told Mrs. Pain that he had met Mr. Godolphin in town yesterday, and he should call and tell Miss Godolphin that he was better in London than he felt here. I don't know, sir, though, that he meant he should call to-night."

The man left the room, and George remained alone. He drummed on the table; he tried several seats in succession; he got up and looked at his face in the glass. A haggard face then. Where was Verrall? Where was Charlotte? She might be able to tell him where Verrall had gone, and when he would be in. Altogether George was in a state of restlessness little better than torture.

He impatiently opened the glass doors, which were only closed, not fastened, and stood a few moments looking out upon the night. He gazed in all directions, but could see nothing of Charlotte; and Mr. Verrall did not appear to be coming. "I'll see," suddenly exclaimed George, starting off, "whether he is at Ashlydyat."

He did well. Action is better than inertness at these moments. Standing outside the porch at Ashlydyat, talking to a friend, was Andrew, one of their servants. When he saw George, he drew back to hold open the door for him.

"Are my sisters alone, Andrew?"

"Yes sir."

George scarcely expected the answer, and it disappointed him. "Quite alone?" he reiterated. "Has no one called on them to-night?"

The man shook his head, wondering probably who Mr. George might be expecting to call. "They are all alone, sir. Miss Janet has one of her bad headaches."

George did not want to go in, Mr. Verrall not being there, and this last item afforded him an excuse for retreating without doing so. "Then I'll not disturb her to-night," said he. "You need not say that I came up, Andrew."

"Very well, sir."

He quitted Andrew, and turned off to the left, deep in thought, striking into a sheltered path. It was by no means the direct road back to the Folly, neither was it to Prior's Ash. In point of fact, it led to nothing but the Dark Plain and its superstition. Not a woman-servant of Ashlydyat, perhaps not one of its men, would have gone

down that path at night; for at the other end it brought them not to the archway, before which the Shadow was wont to show itself.

Why did George take it? He could not have told. Had he been asked why, he might have said that one way, to a man bowed under a sharp weight of trouble, is the same as another. True. But the path led him to no part where he could wish to go; and he would have to make his way to Lady Godolphin's Folly through the gorse bushes of the Dark Plain, over the very Shadow itself. These apparently chance steps, which seem to be taken without premeditation or guidance of ours, sometimes lead to strange results.

George went along moodily, his hands in his pockets, his footfalls slow and light. But for the latter fact, he might not have had the pleasure of disturbing a certain scene that was taking place under cover of the archway.

Were they ghosts, enacting it? Scarcely. Two forms, ghostly or human, were there. One of them looked like a woman's. It was dressed in dark clothes, and a dark shawl was folded over the head, not, however, concealing the features—and they were those of Charlotte Pain. She, at any rate, was not ghostly. The other, George took to be Mr. Verrall. He was leaning against the brickwork, in apparently as hopeless a mood as George himself.

They were enjoying a quarrel. Strange that they should leave the house and come to this lonely spot in the grounds of Ashlydyat to hold it! Charlotte was evidently in one of her tempers. She paced to and fro under the archway, something like a restrained tiger, pouring forth a torrent of sharp words and reproaches, all in a suppressed tone.

"I'll tell you what it is," were the first distinct words of anger George caught. But her companion interrupted her, his tone one of sadness and humility.

"I'll tell you what it is, Charlotte—"

The start made by George Godolphin at the tones of the voice, the involuntary sound of utter astonishment that escaped him, disturbed them. Charlotte, with a cry of terror, darted one way, her companion another.

But the latter was not quick enough to elude George Godolphin. Springing forward, George caught him in his powerful grasp, really to assure himself that it was no ghost, but genuine flesh and blood. Then George turned the face to the starlight, and recognized the features of the dead-and-gone Mr. Rodolf Pain.

The return of a husband, popularly supposed to be dead and out of the way for good, may be regarded by the wife as a blessing from some special providence, or as a source of annoying embarrassment, according to the lady's own feeling on the subject. Undoubtedly, Charlotte Pain looked upon it, and most unmistakably so, in the latter light. Charlotte knew, better than the world, that Mr. Rodolf Pain was not dead; but she had believed him to be as surely out of her way as though death and some safe metropolitan cemetery had irrevocably claimed him. Whatever trifling accident might have happened to put Mr. Rodolf Pain and the British criminal law at issue, Charlotte, at any rate, had assumed it one not to be easily got over, except by the perpetual exile of the gentleman from the British shores. When the little affair had occurred, and Mr. Rodolf had saved himself and his liberty by only a hair's-breadth, choosing a foreign exile and a false name in preference to some notoriety at a certain court (a court which does not bear a pleasant sound, and rises ominous and dark and gloomy in the heart of the city), it had pleased Charlotte and those connected with her to give out that Mr. Rodolf Pain had died. In Mr. Rodolf Pain's going out of the world by death, there was certainly no disgrace, provided that he went out naturally; that is, without what may be called malice prepense on his own part. But, for Mr. Rodolf Pain to be compelled to make his exit from London society after another fashion, was quite a different affair—an affair which could never have been quite tolerated by Charlotte: not on his score, but on her own. Any superfluous consideration for him, Charlotte had never been troubled with. Before her marriage she had regarded him in the light of a nonentity; since that ceremony, as an incumbrance. Therefore, on the whole, Charlotte was tolerably pleased to get rid of him, and she played her role of widow to perfection. No inconvenient disclosure, as to the facts of his hasty exit, had come out to the public, for it had fortunately happened that the transaction, or transactions, which led to it, had not been done in his own name. To describe Charlotte's dismay when he returned, and she found her fond assumption of his perpetual exile to have been a false security, would take a cleverer pen than mine. No other misfortune known to earth, could have been looked upon by Charlotte as so dire a calamity. Had Prior's Ash

been blown up, herself included, by some sprung mine, or swallowed down by an earthquake, it would have been little, in comparison.

It certainly was not pleasant to be startled by a faint tap at the unscreened window, while she sat under the chandelier, busy at what she so rarely attempted, some useless fancy-work. Yet that was the unceremonious manner in which her husband made his return known to her. Charlotte was expecting no visitors that night. It was the night of George Godolphin's dinner-party, at which Mr. Verrall had not appeared, having started for London instead. When the tapping came, Charlotte turned her head towards the window in surprise. No one was in the habit of entering that way, save free-and-easy George Godolphin; he would now and then do so; sometimes Mr. Verrall. But Charlotte knew of George's dinner party, and Mr. Verrall was away. She could see nothing of the intruder: the room was ablaze with light; outside, it was, comparatively speaking, dark; and the window was also partially shaded by its lace curtains. Charlotte thought she must have been mistaken, and went on unravelling her crochet mat.

The tapping came again. "Very odd!" thought Charlotte. "Come in," she called out.

No one came in. There was no response at all for a minute or two. Then there came another timid tapping.

Charlotte's dress was half covered with cotton. She rose, shook it, let the cotton and the mat (what remained of it) fall to the ground, walked to the window, and opened it.

At the first moment she could see nothing. It was bright moonlight, and she had come from the blazing light within, beside which that outer light was so cold and pure. Not for that reason could she see nothing, but because there appeared to be nothing to see. She ranged her eyes in vain over the terrace, over the still landscape beyond.

"Charlotte!"

It was the faintest possible voice, and close to her. Faint as it was though, there was that in its tone which struck on every fibre of Charlotte's frame with dismay. Gathered against the walls of the

Folly, making a pretence to shelter himself beyond a brilliant cape-jessamine which was trained there, was the slight figure of a man. A mere shred of a man, with a shrinking, attenuated frame: the frame of one who has lived in some long agony, bodily or mental: and a white face that shivered as he stood.

Not more white, not more shivering than Charlotte's. Her complexion—well, you have heard of it, as one too much studied to allow vulgar changes to come upon it, in a general way. But there are moments in a lifetime when Nature asserts herself, and Art retires before her. Charlotte's face turned to the hue of the dead, and Charlotte's dismay broke forth in a low passionate wail. It was Rodolf Pain.

A moment of terrified bewilderment; a torrent of rapid words; not of sympathy, or greeting, but of anger; and Charlotte was pushing him away with her hands, she neither knew nor cared whither. It was dangerous for him to be there, she said. He must go.

"I'll go into the thicket, Charlotte," he answered, pointing to the trees on the left. "Come to me there."

He glided off as he spoke, under cover of the walls. Charlotte, feeling that she should like to decline the invitation had she dared, enveloped her head and shoulders in a black shawl, and followed him; nothing satisfactory came of the interview — except recrimination. Charlotte was in a towering passion that he should have ventured back at all; Rodolf complained that between them all he had been made the scapegoat. In returning home, she caught sight of George Godolphin approaching the house, just as she was about to steal across the lawn. Keeping under cover of the trees, she got in by a back entrance, and sat down to her work in the drawing-room, protesting to George, when he was admitted, that she had not been out. No wonder her face looked strange in spite of its embellishments!

Her interviews with Rodolf Pain appeared to be ill chosen. On the following night she met him in the same place: he had insisted upon it, and she did not dare refuse. More recrimination, more anger; in the midst of which George Godolphin again broke upon them. Charlotte screamed aloud in her terror, and Rodolf ran away. But that Charlotte laid detaining hands upon George, the returned man

might have been discovered then, and that would not have suited Charlotte.

A few more days and that climax was to arrive. The plantation appearing unsafe, Rodolf Pain proposed the archway. There they should surely be unmolested: the ghostly fears of the neighbourhood and of Ashlydyat kept every one away from the spot. And there, two or three times, had Charlotte met him, quarrelling always, when they were again intruded upon, and again by George. This time to some purpose.

George Godolphin's astonishment was excessive. In his wildest flights of fancy he had never given a thought to the suspicion that Rodolf Pain could be alive. Charlotte had not been more confidential with George than with the rest of the world. Making a merit of what could not well be avoided, she now gave him a few particulars.

For when she looked back in her flight and saw that Rodolf Pain was fairly caught, that there was no further possibility of the farce of his death being kept up to George, she deemed it well to turn back again. Better bring her managing brains to the explanation, than leave it to that simple calf, whom she had the honour of calling husband. The fact was, Rodolf Pain had never been half cunning enough, half rogue enough, for the work assigned him by Mr. Verrall. He—Mr. Verrall—had always said that Rodolf had brought the trouble upon himself, in consequence of trying to exercise a little honesty. Charlotte agreed with the opinion: and every contemptuous epithet cast by Mr. Verrall on the unfortunate exile, Charlotte had fully echoed.

George was some little time before he could understand as much as was vouchsafed him of the explanation. They stood in the shadow of the archway, Charlotte keeping her black shawl well over her head and round her face; Rodolf, his arms folded, leaning against the inner circle of the stonework.

"What, do you say? sent you abroad?" questioned George, somewhat bewildered.

"It was that wretched business of Appleby's," replied Rodolf Pain. "You must have heard of it. The world heard enough of it."

"Appleby—Appleby? Yes, I remember," remarked George. "A nice swindle it was. But what had you to do with it?"

- "In point of fact, I only had to do with it at second-hand," said Rodolf Pain, his tone one of bitter meaning. "It was Verrall's affair—as everything else is. I only executed his orders."

"But surely neither you nor Verrall had anything to do with that swindling business of Appleby's?" cried George, his voice as full of amazement as the other's was of bitterness.

Charlotte interposed, her manner so eager, so flurried, as to impart the suspicion that she must have some personal interest in it. "Rodolf, hold your tongue! Where's the use of bringing up this old speculative nonsense to Mr. George Godolphin? He does not care to hear about it."

"I would bring it up to all the world if I could," was Rodolf's answer, ringing with its own sense of injury. "Verrall told me in the most solemn manner that if things ever cleared, through Appleby's death, or in any other way, so as to make it safe for me to return, that that hour he would send for me. Well; Appleby has been dead these six months; and yet he leaves me on, on, on, in the New World, without so much as a notice of it. Now, it's of no use growing fierce again, Charlotte! I'll tell Mr. George Godolphin if I please. I am not the patient slave you helped to drive abroad: the trodden worm turns at last. Do you happen to know, sir, that Appleby's dead?"

"I don't know anything about Appleby," replied George. "I remember the name, as being owned by a gentleman who was subjected to some bad treatment in the shape of swindling, by one Rustin. But what had you or Verrall to do with it?"

"Psha!" said Rodolf Pain. "Verrall was Rustin."

George Godolphin opened his eyes to their utmost width. "N—o!" he said, very slowly, certain curious ideas beginning to crowd into his mind. Certain remembrances also.

"He was.—Charlotte, I tell you it is of no use: I will speak. What does it matter, Mr. George Godolphin's knowing it? Verrall was the real principal—Rustin, in fact; I, the ostensible one. And I had to suffer."

"Did Appleby think you were Rustin?" inquired George, thoroughly bewildered.

"Appleby at one time thought I was Verrall. Oh, I assure you there were wheels within wheels at work there. Of course there had to be, to carry on such a concern as that. It is so still. Verrall, you know, could not be made the scapegoat; he takes care of that—besides, it would blow the whole thing to pieces, if any evil fell upon him. It fell upon me, and I had to suffer for it, and abroad I went. I did not grumble; it would have been of no use: had I stayed at home and braved it out, I should have been sent abroad, I suppose, at her Majesty's cost—"

Charlotte interrupted, in a terrible passion. "Have you no sense of humiliation, Rodolf Pain, that you tell these strange stories? Mr. George Godolphin, I pray you do not listen to him!"

"I am safe," replied George. "Pain can say what he pleases. It is safe with me."

"As to humiliation, that does not fall so much to my share as it does to another's, in the light I look at it. I was not the principal; I was only the scapegoat; principals rarely are made the scapegoats in that sort of business. Let it go, I say. I took the punishment without a word. But, now that the man's dead, and I can come home with safety, I want to know why I was not sent for?"

"I don't believe the man's dead," observed Charlotte.

"I am quite sure that he is dead," said Rodolf Pain. "I was told it from a sure and certain source, some one who came out there, and who used to know Appleby. He said the death was in the Times, and he knew it for a fact besides."

"Appleby? Appleby?" mused George, his thoughts going back to a long-past morning, when he had been an unseen witness to Charlotte's interview with a gentleman giving that name—who had previously accosted him in the porch at Ashlydyat, mistaking it for the residence of Mr. Verrall. "I remember his coming down here once."

"I remember it too," said Rodolf Pain, significantly, "and the passion it put Verrall into. Verrall thought his address, down here, had oozed out through my carelessness. The trouble that we had with that Appleby, first and last! It went on for years. The bother was patched up at times, but only to break out again; and to send me into exile at last."

"Does Verrall know of his death?" inquired George of Rodolf.

"There's not a doubt that he must know of it. And Charlotte says she won't ask Verrall, and won't tell him I am here! My belief is that she knows Appleby's dead."

Charlotte had resumed her walk under the archway: pacing there—as was remarked before—like a restrained tiger. She took no notice of Rodolf's last speech.

"Why not tell Verrall yourself that you are here?" was George's sensible question.

"Well—you see, Mr. George Godolphin, I'd rather not, as long as there's the least doubt as to Appleby's death. I feel none myself: but if it should turn out to be a mistake, my appearance here would do good neither to me nor to Verrall. And Verrall's a dangerous man to cross. He might kill me in his passion. It takes a good deal to put him into one, but when it does come, it's like a tornado."

"You acknowledge that there is a doubt as to Appleby's death, then!" sarcastically cried Charlotte.

"I say that it's just possible. It was not being fully certain that brought me back in this clandestine way. What I want you to do is to ask Verrall if Appleby's dead. I believe he will answer 'Yes.' 'Very well,' then you can say, 'Rodolf Pain's home again.' And if—"

"And if he says, 'No, he is not dead,' what then?" fiercely interrupted Charlotte.

"Then you can tell me privately, and I must depart the way I came."

But I don't depart without being satisfied of the fact," pointedly added Mr. Pain, as if he had not entire and implicit reliance upon

Charlotte's word. "My firm belief is that he is dead, and that Verrall will tell you

f he is dead. In that case I am a free man to-morrow."

Charlotte turned her head towards him, terrible anger in her tone, and in her face. "And how is your reappearance to be accounted for to those who look upon you as dead?"

"I don't care how," indifferently answered Rodolf. "I did not spread the report of my own death. If you did, you can contradict it."

"If I did do it, it was to save your reputation," returned Charlotte, scarcely able to speak in her passion.

"I know," said Rodolf Pain. "You feared something or other might come out about your husband, and so you thought you'd kill me off-hand. Two for yourself and one for me, Charlotte."

She did not answer.

"If my coming back is so annoying to you, we can live apart," he resumed. "You pretty well gave me a sickener before I went away. As you know."

"This must be an amusing dialogue to Mr. George Godolphin!" fumed Charlotte.

"May-be," replied Rodolf Pain, his tone sad and weary. "I have been so hardly treated between you and Verrall, Charlotte, that I don't care who knows it."

"Where are you staying?" asked George, wondering whether the shady spots about Ashlydyat sheltered him by day as well as by night.

"Not far away, sir: at a roadside inn," was the answer. "No one knew me much, about here, in the old days; but, to make assurance doubly sure, I only come out in the evening. Look here, Charlotte. If you refuse to ask Verrall, or to help me, I shall go to London, and obtain

the information there. I am not quite without friends in the great city: they would receive me better than you have received me."

"I wonder you did not go there at once," said Charlotte, sharply.

"It was natural that I should go first where my wife was," returned Rodolf Pain; "even though she had not been the most affectionate of wives to me."

Charlotte was certainly not showing herself particularly affectionate then, whether she had, or had not, in the past days. Truth to say, whatever may have been her personal predilection or the opposite for the gentleman, his return had brought all her fears to the surface. His personal safety was imperilled; and, with that, disgrace loomed in ominous attendance; a disgrace which would be reflected upon Charlotte. Could she have sent Rodolf Pain flying on electric wires to the remotest region of the known or unknown globe, she would have done it then.

Leaving them to battle out their dispute alone, George Godolphin bent his steps to Lady Godolphin's Folly, walking over the very Shadow, black as jet, treading in and out amid the dwarf bushes, which, when regarded from a distance, looked so like graves. He gained the Folly, and rang.

The servant admitted him to the drawing-room. It was empty as before. "Has Mr. Verrall not come in?" asked George.

"He has come in, sir. I thought he was here. I will look for him."

George sat on alone. Presently the man returned. "My master has retired for the night, sir."

"What! Gone to bed?" cried George. "Yes, sir."

"Did you tell him I had been here when he came in?"

"I told him you had been here, sir. In fact, I thought you were here still. I did not know you had left."

"Did Mr. Verrall tell you now that he could see me?"

"He told me to say that he had retired for the night, sir."

"Is he in bed?" questioned George.

The servant hesitated. "He spoke to me through the door, sir. He did not open it."

George caught up his hat, the very movement of his hand showing displeasure. "Tell your master that I shall be here the first thing in the morning. I want to see him."

He passed out, a conviction upon his mind—though he could scarcely tell why it should have arisen—that Mr. Verrall had not retired for the night, but that he had gone upstairs merely to avoid him. The thought angered him excessively. When he had gone some little distance beyond the terrace, he turned and looked at the upper windows of the house. There shone a light in Mr. Verrall's chamber. "Not in bed, at any rate," thought George. "He might have seen me if he would, I shall tell him—"

A touch upon George's arm. Some one had glided silently up. He turned and saw Charlotte.

"You will not betray the secret that you have learnt to-night?" she passionately whispered.

"Is it likely?" he asked.

"He is only a fool, you know, at the best," was her next complimentary remark. "But fools give more trouble sometimes than wise people."

"You may depend upon me," was George's rejoinder. "Where is he?"

"Got rid of for the night," said Charlotte, in a terrible tone. "Are you going in to see Verrall?"

"No. Verrall declines to see me. I am going home. Good night."

"Declines to see you? He is tired, I suppose. Good night, George!"

George Godolphin walked away at a sober pace, reflecting on the events of the day—of the evening. That he had been intensely surprised by the resuscitation of Rodolf Pain was indisputable; but George had too much care upon him to give it more than a passing thought, now that the surprise was over. Rodolf Pain occupied a very small space in the estimation of George Godolphin. Charlotte had just said he was a fool: probably George shared in the opinion.

But, however much he felt inclined to dismiss the gentleman from his mind, he could not so readily dismiss a certain revelation made by him. That Rustin was Verrall. Whoever "Rustin" may have been, or what had been his influence on the fortunes, good or ill, of Mr. George Godolphin, it concerns us not very closely to inquire. That George had had dealings with this "Rustin"—dealings which did not bear for him any pleasant reminiscence—and that George had never in his life got to see this Rustin, are sufficient facts for us to know. Rustin was one of those who had contrived to ease George of a good deal of superfluous money at odd times, leaving only trouble in its place. Many a time had George prayed Verrall's good offices with his friend Rustin, to hold over this bill; to renew that acceptance. Verrall had never refused, and his sympathy with George and abuse of Rustin were great, when his mediation proved—as was sometimes the case—unsuccessful. To hear that this Rustin was Verrall himself opened out a whole field of suggestive speculation to George. Not pleasant speculation, you may be sure.

He sat himself down, in his deep thought, on that same spot where Thomas Godolphin had sat the evening of George's dinner-party; the broken bench, near the turnstile. Should he be able to weather the storm that was gathering so ominously above his head? Was that demand of Lord Averil's to-day the first rain-drop of the darkening clouds? In sanguine moments—and most moments are sanguine to men of the light temperament of George Godolphin—he felt not a doubt that he should weather it. There are some men who systematically fling care and gloom from them. They cannot look trouble steadily in the face: they glance aside from it; they do not see it if it comes: they clothe it with the rose-hues of hope: but look at it, they do not. Shallow and careless by nature, they cannot feel deep sorrow themselves, or be too cautious of any wrong they inflict on others. They may bring ruin upon the world, but they go jauntily on their way. George had gone on in his way, in an easy, gentlemanly sort of manner, denying himself no gratification, and giving little heed to the day of reckoning that might come.

But on this night his mood had changed. Affairs generally were wearing to him an aspect of gloom: of gloom so preternaturally dark and hopeless, that his spirits were weighed down by it. For one thing, this doubt of Verrall irritated him. If the man had played him false, had been holding the cards of a double game, why, what an utter fool he, George, had been! How long he sat on that lonely seat he never knew: as long as his brother had, that past night. The one had been ruminating on his forthcoming fate—death; the other was lost in the anticipation of a worse fate—disgrace and ruin. As he rose to pursue his way down the narrow and ghostly Ash-tree Walk, a low cry burst from his lips, sharp as the one that had been wrung from Thomas in his physical agony.

Part 2. Chapter 10.

NINE THOUSAND AND FORTY-FIVE POUNDS.

A Short time elapsed. Summer weather began to show itself in Prior's Ash, and all things, so far as any one saw or suspected, were going on smoothly. Not a breath of wind had yet stirred up the dangerous current; not the faintest cloud had yet come in the fair sky, to indicate that a storm might be gathering. One rumour however had gone forth, and Prior's Ash mourned sincerely and trusted it was not true—the state of health of Thomas Godolphin. He attacked with an incurable complaint, as his mother had been? Prior's Ash believed it not.

He had returned from his visit to town with all his own suspicions confirmed. But the medical men had seemed to think that the fatal result might not overtake him yet; probably not for years. They enjoined tranquillity upon him, both of mind and body, and recommended him to leave the cares of business, so far as was practicable, to other people. Thomas smiled when he recited this piece of advice to George. "I had better retire upon my fortune," he laughed.

"Do so," cried George, impulsively. "That is" —for a disagreeable consciousness came upon him, as he spoke, that Thomas's "fortune," if looked into, might be found more easy to talk of than to realize—"you can virtually retire, by remaining quietly at Ashlydyat. Don't come down to the Bank. I can manage quite well without you."

Thomas shook his head. "So long as I am at all capable, George, I shall not give up. I believe it is my duty not to do so. If what the doctors say is correct—that I may live on in my present state, or nearly in my present state, for years—you may be an older and a wiser man by the time you are left alone. When you shall have gained grey hair, George, and a stoop in the shoulders, Prior's Ash will be thinking you a stronger and a better man than I have ever been."

George made no reply. He knew which had been the better man, himself or his brother.

Everything, I say, seemed to go on in its old routine. Thomas Godolphin came to business; not every day, but frequently. George gave his dinner-parties, and rode as much as ever with Charlotte Pain. What Charlotte had done with her husband, was her affair. He no longer disturbed the night stillness of the Dark Plain, or of Lady Godolphin's Folly; and not a suspicion of his unwelcome revival from the dead had transpired beyond George Godolphin. Charlotte casually said one day to George that Rodolf was in London. Perhaps he was.

Yes, gay as ever, in the day, was George Godolphin. If he had care, he kept it to himself, and no one saw or suspected it. George was persuadable as a child; seeing little farther than his own nose; and Mr. Verrall had contrived to lull the suspicions awakened by the words of Rodolf Pain. Mr. Verrall had not remained long at Lady Godolphin's Folly: he was soon away again, and Charlotte had it to herself, queen regnant. George had not forgotten to pay his evening visits there. There or elsewhere, he was out most evenings. And when he came in, he would go into the Bank, and remain alone in the manager's room, often for hours.

One evening—it was the greatest wonder in the world—he had not gone out. At eight o'clock he had gone into the Bank and shut himself in. An hour afterwards Maria knocked, and he admitted her.

George was at a large table; it was covered with account-books. Hard at work he appeared to be, making entries with his pen, by the light of his shaded lamp. "How busy you are, George!" she cried.

"Ay," said he, pleasantly. "Let no one call me idle again."

"But why need you do it, George? You used not to work at night."

"More work falls to my score, now Thomas does not take his full share of it," observed George.

"Does it? I fancied neither you nor Thomas had much actual work to do. I thought you left it to the clerks. Isaac laughed at me one day, a long time ago, when I said something about your keeping the bank accounts. He asked me what I thought clerks were paid for."

"Never mind Isaac. What have you come in for? To tell me you are dull?—as you did last night."

"No. But I do get to feel very dull in an evening. You are scarcely ever with me now, George."

"Business must be attended to," responded George. "You should get some visitors in."

"They would not be you," was Maria's answer, simply spoken. "I came to tell you now that papa is here. Have you time to come and see him?"

George knitted his brow. The prospect of entertaining the Reverend Mr. Hastings did not appear to have charms for him. Not that he allowed Maria to see the frown. She continued: "Papa has been talking about the Chisholm property. The money is paid over, and he has brought it here for safety."

"Brought it to-night?" echoed George.

"Yes. He said it might be an unprofessional mode of doing business, but he supposed you would receive it," she added, laughing.

"How much is it?" cried George—all too eagerly, had Maria not been unsuspicious.

"Nine—let me see—yes, I think he said nine thousand pounds."

George Godolphin closed the books before him, more than one of which was open, locked them up, put out the lamp, and accompanied his wife to the dining-room.

"Will you let me lodge some money here to-night?" asked Mr. Hastings, as he shook hands.

"As much as you like," replied George, gaily. "We can accommodate an unlimited amount."

The Rector took out a large pocket-book, and counted down some bank-notes upon the table. "Brierly, the agent, brought it to me an

hour ago," he observed, "and I had rather your Bank had charge of it than my house. Nine thousand and forty-five pounds, Mr. George."

George counted the notes after Mr. Hastings. "I wonder Brierly did not give a cheque for it," he observed. "Did he bring the money over from Binham?"

"He came over in his gig. He said it had been paid to him in money, and he brought it just as it was. I'll trouble you for a receipt, George."

George carried the money away and came back with the receipt.

"It must be placed to your account, I suppose, sir?" he observed.

"Of course," answered Mr. Hastings. "You can't place it to the credit of the little Chisholms. It is the first time I was ever left trustee," he remarked, "and I hope it will be the last."

"Why so?" asked George.

"Why so? Because I like neither the trouble nor the responsibility. As soon as my co-trustee returns, the money is to be placed out on approved security: until then, you must take charge of it. It is a small sum after all, compared with what was expected."

"Very small," assented George. "Is it all that the property has realized?"

"Every shilling—except the expenses. And lawyers, and agents, and auctioneers, take care that they shall never be slight," added Mr. Hastings, his lip curling with the cynical expression that was sometimes seen on it.

"It's their trade, sir."

"Ay. What a cutting up of property it is, this forced selling of an estate, through death!" he exclaimed. "Many a time has poor Chisholm said to me, in his last illness: 'There'll be hard upon twenty thousand to divide amongst them, when it's all sold.' And there is not ten!"

"I suppose everything was sold?" said George.

"Everything. House, land, ricks as they stood, farming stock, cattle, and furniture: everything, even to the plate and the books. The will so expressed it. I suppose Chisholm thought it best."

"Where are the children, papa?" asked Maria.

"The two girls are at school, the little boy is with his grandmother. I saw the girls last week when I was at Binham."

"The boy is to be a clergyman, is he not, papa?"

The Rector answered the question in a tone of rebuke. "When he shall be of an age to choose, should he evince liking and fitness for the Church, then he is to be allowed to enter it. Not otherwise, Maria."

"How is the property left?" asked George.

"It is to be invested, and the interest devoted to the education and maintenance of the three, the boy being allowed a larger share of the than the girls. When the youngest, the boy, shall be of age, the principal is to be divided equally between them. Such are the terms of the will."

"What is it to be invested in?"

"The funds, I suppose. It is left to the discretion of myself and Mr. Harknar. I shall let him decide: he is more of a man of business than I am."

So they talked on. When Mr. Hastings, a short while before, had found himself left guardian and co-trustee to the children of a friend just deceased, his first impulse had been to decline the trust. Eventually he had accepted it. The other gentleman named, Mr. Harknar, had gone on business to one of the Ionian Islands, but he was now shortly expected home.

An hour the Rector sat with them, talking of the orphaned Chisholms, and of other matters. When he took his departure,

George went again into the Bank, and sat down to work at his books by the light of the shaded lamp. He was certainly more attentive to business by night than by day.

With thanks to the Literary Heritage - West Midlands
<http://www.literaryheritage.org.uk>

Printed in the United Kingdom by
Lightning Source UK Ltd., Milton Keynes
138578UK00001B/162/P



Mrs. Ellen Wood (née Price) (1814-1887), was an English novelist, better known as "Mrs. Henry Wood". She was born at Worcester. She wrote over 30 novels, many of which enjoyed remarkable popularity. Among the best known of her stories are *Danesbury House* (1860), *East Lynne* (1861), *The Channings* (1862), *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles* (1862), *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (1863), *Verner's Pride* (1863), *Oswald Cray* (1864) and *Lord Oakburn's Daughters* (1864). For many years, she worked as the proprietor and editor of the *Argosy*. Her most popular novel, *East Lynne* was a Victorian bestseller and is still sometimes performed as a drama. It is remembered chiefly for its elaborate and implausible plot, centering on double identity and bigamy. Other works include: *Elster's Folly* (1866), *Johnny Ludlow* (1868-89), *Anne Hereford* (1868), *Bessy Rane* (1870), *Our Children* (1876) and *Lady Adelaide* (1879).



www.dodopress.co.uk
dodo@dodopress.co.uk

*Dodo Press specialises in the publication and
distribution of rare and out-of-print books.*

ISBN 978-1-4099-0819-7



9 781409 908197